Wait, is this just GATE? (355/?)

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Writer's note: Gentle reminder that the world of Petravus has a different atmospheric composition than ours (albeit only barely) and also slightly more gravity.

That's my excuse for the iffy fall time in this chapter and IDK how nerdy yall get. I'm stickin to it.

Enjoy.

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James was sitting out on one of the observation decks enjoying some pastries when he heard it.

Gorna was sitting a few spaces over, resting on a chair made specifically for centaurs and other quadrupedal people. Her ears perking up and angling upwards were what alerted him that something was coming.

The prince's soldiers, most of them on the deck being griffin riders themselves, began to move about almost as one as a low vibrating hum came from above.

"Rider dropping!" One of the sergeants yelled as the sat in a chair that was almost lying down, looking up through a pair of massive spyglasses that were affixed over it. "North East and three off! Wrestling a black and red!"

"Confirmed!" Another soldier somewhere else yelled, and James saw them in a similar setup on the other side of the deck.

"What's that noise?" James asked even as he pulled out his scouting glasses and powered them on.

"Screamer whistles." One of the nearby soldiers, a relatively young human with the shortcut hair of a fresh recruit. "They attach them to themselves so we know when they're falling."

"Is it the princess?" Gorna asked. But the soldiers at the spyglass chairs ignored her.

"Status!" The watch captain, a large orc, demanded as he stepped up onto the deck.

"Looks like Krom!" One of the observers said. "Blonde hair! Not large enough to be the prince!"

"Whoever they are they're in a spin!" The other informed them. "Either they have one of the wings bound or there's a problem!"

The Captain walked over to one of the rails at the side of the deck.

"CATCH TEAMS! PREP FOR INTERCEPTION! WE'VE GOT A RIDER BREAKING!" He yelled. There was a chorus of yells and cries of confirmation as the first of a wing of riders took to the air and moved up. "NORTH EAST AND THREE OFF!" He added. The first of the riders waved understanding and began to climb.

"Where's Amina?" James asked under his breath as he used the controls on the side of his glasses to zoom in and try to spot her. "Come onnnnnn."

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Amina grunted as she slammed into a wing, causing the griffin it belonged to to screech in surprise as she did. The impact put her into a spin and she released a burst of air from her hand to correct her path. But the surprised griffin's cries had startled the other griffins into new paths too.

She looked for her mark as she regained her sense of direction. It had re-angled and she burst more air out to match.

But the griffins were aware of an intruder now. Or rather a second intruder, since Krom had already made his leap. And they began to roll to get a visual on the newcomer.

Talons began to flex and beaks began to snap as she plummeted past them.

Then the blue, green, and brown griffin that she desired rolled in a spin and looked right at her.

The two of them locked eyes for what, in her magic enhanced vision, felt like minutes.

Like all the other griffins it looked angry. Then it seemed to realize where she was heading and she saw surprise as its eyes widened.

That's right. She thought. *You're already mine.*

The griffin beat its wings and writhed in mid-air, doing everything it could to get out of her path. But Amina saw it all occur in slow motion, and before it could even get the first beat completed two massive blasts of wind emanated from her hands and propelled her forward.

The griffin screeched as she slammed into its ribs like a cannon shot. Her hands flew to her belt in a blur and quickly scrambled to grab the first set of restraints out and around its neck.

BANG!

Amina jerked back in shock as the creature's massive beak snapped shut just to the side of her head with a noise that sounded eerily like James's pistol being fired. She climbed like a spider over the bests side, dodging thrashing talons as she held onto handfuls of fur and feathers with a death grip.

The two of them rolled like that for what felt like an eternity. For so long that the swarm faded back behind them.

When it snapped at her again she used the motion to trick it into biting the small net webbing she'd been given, and scrambled to strap it behind the things neck. The buckle, while decently large, was too finicky to deal with right now. So she settled for holding the two opposing ends in her hand, wrapped around the shoulder that had grown used to the pulling of her animated shield. Her legs gripped the griffin's ribs harder than she'd ever clamped onto a horse or a tamed griffin before.

And the two of them continued to plummet as they each struggled for control of each other.

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"Second rider!" The second of the two observers called. "Same direction! Two in!"

"Confirmed! And third rider following!" The first observer said. "First one is wrestling! Third is lone! I think it's the prince!"

"Is it Amina?" James asked, and was once again ignored. He was reminded of times when random LT's had tried to interfere in the engine bay back on Earth and been ignored by the NCO's and Chiefs that had been waist deep in engine parts and power tools. He was an interloper in this event. An observer who could only slow these soldiers down in their job.

But the captain took pity on him. "It has to be." He said sternly with an annoyed look as James looked at him. "The third one is the prince, who can fly. The rest of the climbers have already either been retrieved or signaled that they were climbing back down at their own pace. That only leaves her."

"Is she okay?" James asked as he scanned the sky with his glasses. It took a minute, but he did find her.

"That is between her and the griffin." The captain said as he went to the opposing side of the deck from before. "SECOND TEAM! GO!"

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Amina felt a flash of pain, and had to hold onto the improvised reins as one of the griffins rear legs raked at her leg. She looked down for a moment and saw three long, but remarkably clean, lines of torn leather with blood seeping down the side.

She let go with her legs, letting herself free-fall for a few seconds as she held on with only the straps in her hands tying the two of them together.

The griffin thrashed and spun, making her dizzy as it did, doing everything it could to get rid of her as it also clawed at the ropes and straps around its face.

Amina waited for it to initiate another diving spin before pulling her self back in quickly. This time she impacted closer to her goal, landing just off center of the griffin's back and causing it to squawk in surprise and frustration. As she did she threw one of the weighted ropes at the wing that was further away from her, spinning it as she did. She cursed herself as it sailed just past the wing and off into the open air. Even as she did, the wing closest to her beat at her rapidly. If Kraug the Orc had decided to repeatedly slam his massive arms into her, it would have been more pleasant. Her injured leg screamed in pain as she forced it to snake around the offending wing and attempt to pin it.

^("AMINAAAA!!!") Someone shouted from above them. ^("YOU HAVE TO BIND THEM!")

She didn't hear it. Not through the rushing wind, screeching beast, and screaming whistles. Or above the blood pounding through her ears.

She grabbed another of the weighted lines. She had three left, and needed a minimum of two to succeed. All the while the wing thrashed against the arm and leg that were attempting to pin it in place. Though the arm in question was also still holding the straps that restrained the griffin's head.

And the ground was rising towards them.

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"Sergeant Krom is clear sir!" One of the observers reported, though James stopped listening as soon as he heard the name.

"Come on." He said as he watched his wife and the griffin she was wrestling with continue to plummet. The range finder on his readout couldn't even get a reading on how far she was. And it was supposedly rated for up to three kilometers. And his view of her was so heavily pixelated from zooming in that he couldn't ACTUALLY see her clearly.

What he could see was that she and the griffin were tumbling end over end. He could also see the black winged form of the prince plummeting after them and circling them as he matched their speed. He wondered why the prince wasn't helping her.

If he hadn't been so focused on her he would have noticed the way Gorna and Glag began to look at him curiously. The bottoms of his feet were beginning to glow and flutter as magical energy instinctively began concentrating on them.

"Come on Aminaaaaaa."

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Amina had been mid throw when the Griffin headbutted her. She'd opted to keep one end of the line in her hand this time, and that was the only thing that let her keep attached to the monstrous hybrid.

She had a split second's warning as she felt the makeshift reins go slack in her hand. But by then she'd already been releasing the weighted line to wrap around the unrestrained wing.

The griffin's head slammed into her in an impact so ferocious it reminded her of how Glag had sent her flying in the arena. Something popped somewhere and she would have screamed in pain if she hadn't also felt her consciousness fade out for a moment. Her left hand let go of the straps it had been holding onto. It's fingers limp and prickling with numbness

But her left hand kept a hold of its end of the rope, which had successfully wrapped around the base of the opposing wing.

The griffin rolled in a spin, effectively reeling her back into it without realizing. It screeched in fury at the sight of her coming towards it again, and lashed out with one of the claws that wasn't entangled in the netting that it had just removed from its face. The slash attempted to catch her in the side of the ribs. But her numb, and likely dislocated, arm intercepted it without her even consciously telling it to.

The pain brought her back to full consciousness.

Amina's eyes blazed with golden light as she turned to face the source of her pain. Her throat shone bright with the purplish pink light of her family's voice of command power.

She yelled a cry of fury at the griffin, which cringed back in surprise and pain at the sudden verbal onslaught. Amina took advantage of the sudden opportunity and wrapped her wounded legs around one wing in a sort of modified arm hold. Her good arm pinned the other between itself and her waist, and in a battle-rage she hadn't felt since the battle in the dessert, she fought the beast.

Even Alixan, who had made to move in and retrieve her at the sight of the impact, fell back as she screamed and struggled at the monster for control.

There were no ropes or straps or harnesses. No weapons save their own bodies.

In those last few thousand feet there was only a wounded and half mad warrior, and a suddenly very frightened griffin.

And they each fought for their lives.

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Of all the people present on the observation deck, James flinched the least at the sudden sound from above. He had, after all, heard Amina use this power before. He wouldn't be surprised if the local soldiers had heard the prince use that power. But this wasn't the prince. It was Amina.

And James knew how she sounded when she got pissed.

"YOU WILL OBEY ME YOU BASTARD!" Came echoing down from above.

"Bleedin' hells!" One of the soldiers said. "Those two are goin' at it."

And as James watched, reeling back the zoom in his glasses at an increasing rate and glad to gain more clarity, he saw that they were right.

Murmurs rose among the soldiers present as they watched the three bodies continue to plummet.

James's face paled as he saw the flashes of red on Amina's clothes. The familiar red of blood. And knew that that was what had driven her to rage like she was doing now.

"BLEED ME NO MORE!" He heard her bellow as he saw her head flash forward and strike the side of the griffin's face in a headbutt.

"Too low!" Someone exclaimed nearby.

James killed the feed on his left lens and was surprised to see that she couldn't be more than four or five hundred feet above them now.

He saw the already dispatched wing of riders moving to intercept.

He ripped the glasses from his head and tossed them at Gorna, who jumped back in confusion at the unexpected projectile hitting her, and began to run toward the edge of the deck so he could jump off.

Then he faltered and tripped as he saw something amazing.

"YOU ARE MINE!!!!!!" Amina yelled as a set of massive, shimmering, blue and green wings opened up wide above them.

The soldiers all around began to go wide eyed and oohed and aah-ed as a massive, fan-like, tail spread wide behind the griffin. It was supported every few feet by long furred portions that made it look like it was actually many tails in one. Between them were long trailing feathers matching the wings. It looked like it had eyes spread all across it.

James looked up from where he'd fallen to his knees, and was amazed at the sight of the creature.

"It's a damn peacock." He said to himself, though he couldn't recognize the feline parts of the griffin just yet.

They sailed over the grounds, only maybe two hundred feet up now. Way too close for James's liking.

"The princess is clear sir!" One of the observers yelled.

"No shite Malliers!" The guard captain shot back angrily. "We can all see that!" This drew some mild laughter from some of the soldiers.

The laughter quickly stopped as they all watched Amina slump over and fall off the griffin.

James left scorched splinters where his feet exploded, propelling him into the air.

Wait, is this just GATE? (199.5/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wfhyc9/wait_is_this_just_gate_199/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Back that garbage truck on up and tip the bucket. Cause we're at the dump.

THE LORE DUMP!

Again, this is mainly so that I can devote a bit more brainstorming/writing to chapter 200, and so that it can drop on either friday or saturday.

Ready for some..... forbidden knowledge? Relax it's only forbidden because it falls outside the scope of what any of the established characters know/bring to the story. Or it's just something they haven't had reason to reveal in their own narratives.

These aren't actual IN WORLD historical documents or anything, I'm not gonna pretend they are. They're literally just me giving you guys details so you can have some context on different things.

Anyway HEREWEGO!

Enjoy.

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Subject #1: Earth.

The Earth of the setting is vastly different than the one we know of IRL. Namely the story takes place roughly 25\~ years in the future, and society exists in the aftermath of a globally inclusive war that was primarily for control of sources of water. This escalating set of

conflicts, ultimately culminating in a series of tactical nuclear detonations and numerous destroyed cities, came to be known as the Water Wars.

The Water Wars not only involved almost every country on the planet, but also drastically rearranged the borders on the maps. Numerous weaker countries were either conquered or else absorbed into their larger, stronger neighbors. On top of that, more than a few small coastline or island countries were destroyed outright.

America, home of James and more than a few other focal characters, has likewise been changed by the wars.

Most of the west coast has been destroyed by attacks from a combination of Chinese and Russian attacks, as well as raids from Polynesian Insurgents who had already had a troubled past with the U.S. Military.

Los Angeles, once the largest port in the country, was a prime target for enemy attack and was destroyed outright. All that remains is a massive, glassy, crater of irradiated land and burned superstructure. The resulting inflow of ocean water has resulted in it being called the L.A. Bay.

San Diego, a crucial military strong hold in the Water Wars, Suffered a startlingly similar fate. However the Military was able to fortify its positions there AND intercept incoming attacks effectively enough to prevent complete devastation. The once vibrant city became a deadly battlefield, with land, air, and sea battles that would last several years before culminating in a successful defense. However, only a very small civilian population is left in what is now one of the strongest Military Posts on the West Coast.

Seattle followed San Diego's lead and fortified itself almost beyond recognition, attempting to hold off attacks from the same militaries. But a well placed nuclear strike from a Chinese submarine resulted in a lack of viable options for transporting land goods to support the besieged city, resulting in one of the costliest sieges in the war. To the surprise of their attackers, Seattle prevailed, and ever since its citizens carried great pride in the resolve they showed.

San Francisco remained remarkably untouched throughout the war. Many people think that this may be a result of the large population of Chinese Immigrants that were known to live in the city before hostilities became open, however that has never been confirmed. Whatever the case most Americans, especially Water War veterans, look at San Fransisco with intense suspicion to this day. More than a few bar fights have broken out over the subject.

Moving away from the west coast. The center of America was called upon as it hadn't been since World War Two. Farms were devoted to producing mass quantities of food and materials both to support the war effort, and to feed and clothe the civilian population that was rapidly fleeing inland from the coasts to escape the violence and devastation. Factories popped

up seemingly overnight to produce everything from weapons and armor for the troops, to cots and instant shelters for refugees.

Many cities in the central states were overwhelmed by the influx of refugees and became massive shanty towns that have yet to recover. But several, like Denver, Topeka, and Minneapolis managed to adapt to the change. Most impressive was Detroit. Once the butt of jokes for its crime rate, deserted buildings, failed economy, and poor living quality, the Motor City saw the biggest resurgence. Once empty buildings were filled with new residents. Plants and factories were brought to life to produce what they'd once produced en masse, vehicles. Vehicles from the newly repopulated Detroit became the backbone of the military's mobile forces. Even in the aftermath of the war, Detroit has clung to its renewed title as the Motor City.

The east coast, while not as badly affected as the west, was still devastated by the war. While opposing forces, such as the somewhat allied Russian and Chinese navies were capable of engaging in strikes on the coast, most of their western (our eastern) focus was on holding off the combined forces of the European and African Alliance forces. However America still came under attack from the two Communist states, as well as attacks from, of all places, South America. This multi direction conflict was largely rebuffed by the incredibly condensed forces of the various military bases on the east coast, though it did ultimately result in nuclear strikes against New York, Florida, and most devastatingly Washington D.C.

The Water Wars lasted the better part of two decades for the U.S., starting in the late 2020's and for some countries lasting well into the 2040's, only seeing a decline in combat once numerous nuclear strikes across the globe took several former super powers to the brink of actually utilizing M.A.D. and wiping the planet clean of livable land.

This escalation, and increasing civilian deaths and their resulting riots ultimately brought the war to its end. Each nation being forced to choose between either continuing to fight, and risking their governmental dissolution as a result Or ceasing the violence, and turning inward to repair their damage, and utilize newfound technologies to attempt a recovery. Not all of them were capable of doing so, and several countries saw massive reforms into new governmental organizations, the most drastic of which was the massive number of southeast Asian countries that ended up conglomerating as they pushed back against both American AND Chinese control as well as solidified their hold on the ocean around their borders.

Current America, where a lot of our characters are from and work for, is a vastly different country than we currently know. Some parts look like 40k hive cities, while other parts look like they've been ripped straight from a fallout game. For many, like James and a lot of the desert team, joining the military was the best way to ensure themselves a future that didn't require fighting for every scrap of food and drop of water they could get.

\[Writer's note: That should give you guys a good idea of the world James and the Earth gang came from. It's incomplete, as I'm not a Poli-Sci major or anything. Plus, you really only need to know how this stuff fits into James's back story. Since he's kinda the main character if you haven't noticed. And it is kind of the KEY difference between OUR world and theirs. Anyways, moving on.\]

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Subject #2: The world of Petravus.

For the record, the world of Petravus doesn't actually have a name. The people there understand the concept of celestial bodies AKA planets and moons and things. And they have named those things, just like we have (RIP Pluto, you're still a planet to me buddy). But they haven't named their planet, typically simply referring to is as "The World". IDK what yall expected here. We call our planet "Dirt".

\-Sub-subject: Were-folk.

There's tons of were-folk the world over. Probably a few million during the point of time the story is set in.

Wolves ARE the most populous of them. As mentioned in recent chapters, primarily because their instincts are a bit harder for them to control during their youthful years, resulting in more incidental bites. AGAIN, unsancioned bites/infections are **SUPER TABOO** amongst were-folk

A were-folks truest weakness is SILVER. Though they can also be killed via; beheading, incineration, crushing, and basically anything that's going to cause massive damage on a level that will overwhelm their regenerative ability. Yall saw Kela get literally disemboweled and she lived, so you know.... it takes a lot... to get past that.

Also there's a spell, that's super old, and wont come into play in the story. Certain rare, high power, casters know it. The Lunar Council knows it for REASONS. But it is possible to cut a were-person off from the moon's power. Resulting in them being reverted to their non beast form and being INCREDIBLY weakened for the rest of their lives. (Think, fire-lord once he lost his bending. ATLA rules!)

That being said, HERE'S A LIST OF ALL THE BEAST TYPES THAT HAVE A WERE-FOLK FORM (or at least our world's equivalent) arranged from most common to rarest.

1. Wolves
2. Lions
3. Tigers
4. Boars
5. Foxes
6. Jaguars/Panthers
7. Giraffes (They're a touch different though. Probably not gonna elaborate.)
8. Gorillas (Typically red or gold furred.)

9. Squirrels (including rare "flying" variants)
10. Bears
11. Deer
12. Golden Eagles
13. Lynxes
14. Tapirs (Actually thought to be extinct, though that's not confirmed.)
15. Pangolin (Currently only 1 exists.)

\-Sub-Subject #2: MAGIC (I know yall want more details on that)

The simplest way to explain Magic in this setting is to say that it is THE PUREST version of mind over matter.

It taps into the ambient magical energy that infuses every aspect of the world, from the world itself, the more mundane energies that we Earth type folk would know, thermal, hydro, wind, electricity, all that stuff. But also on more esoteric energies such as death, the moon, the soul of the person casting >!(or being sacrificed, but that's a surprise tool that we'll need later)!< And as such a person who gets good at drawing in this energy *Cough Cough JAMES Cough Cough* can become very powerful very quickly.

Once energy has been drawn in a skilled mage/caster can basically do (to a limited extent) anything they can imagine. However they DO have to imagine it in relation to their own body and location. Also, the more complex and powerful the spell the more energy is required to pull it off.

THE BIG LIMITATION ON MAGIC.... is the fact that certain powers clash with numerous factors in the world around the person casting them. These factors can include things like; rules put in place by gods/other more powerful entities, other magical effects in the area, chemical substances in the area, whether or not other casters are drawing from the same energy source, and of course basic physics (Sorry, but James is never gonna explode his way to light speed. Yeah, I know, it'd be dope as hell.)

Now, the workaround for these limitations is rituals and material aides. Believe it or not, Everyone's favorite little red headed mage is actually afraid of heights. This puts a huge damper on her ability to use her flight magic because it gets all up in her visualization process. That's why she has the magical tattoos on her legs. They act like energy stabilizers for those times when she gets inside her own head and freaks out, and basically keep her from falling to her death. They also allow her to fly faster on less energy, cause (quoting Vickers here) she's wicked smaht.

But that's a very mundane, minimal, example of material aides for magic. What about rituals?

Well, rituals are basically a caster's way of asking the gods/forces of nature to let them break rules for a spell. The most obvious examples of this idea are Kela's transformation into a champion, which drew the Moon Goddess's attention directly AND... James getting Steve bonded to his

soul. Soul alteration magic like that is super difficult and watched over by an CURRENTLY unnamed extra-dimensional deity. But the tattoo and the bonding process of actually taming a dragon-kin is used as a sort of combo of physical material, physical pain, and a show of courage from the attempted rider. Plus it does have the caveat of shared pain and the drake dying if its rider does.

\-Sub-Subject #Tres: The Deep Dark

Now I don't wanna SPOIL too much. But very soon we are going to get a much more in depth look at this mysterious realm.

It is pretty much just the Great Value Brand ^(TM) version of the Underdark from D&D. I'm not even gonna deny it.

However where the Underdark is primarily run by dark elves and their spider/drider simpy boiz. The deep dark is actually mostly run by the monsters inhabiting it. What few bastions of "Civilization" exist in the deep are primarily just defensive strong holds chosen for their ability to either hide from the monsters, or give a massive defensive advantage to whoever is in control of it.

The most common denizens of the deep dark are Deep Orcs, Dwelfs (Google it), goblins, Yarbogs (Basically spiny hobgoblins), and of course Dark Elves.

I will say that Dark Elves are actually homies. They're like, the one faction in the Deep Dark that aren't INHERENTLY evil. Don't get me wrong, they're elves, they're gonna be judgmental, but... they're alright. They've also got some other stuff going on that we'll get to later.

Then of course there's the fact that THE AGENCY likes to set its most secretive of locations in the deep dark. That said, as Vickers and the Petravian investigators/mages found out. THEY BUNKER UP HAAAAARD. If Vickers hadn't been walking behind an undead MS PAINT erase tool he wouldn't have gotten to where he was going. Not many things can.

Also, some of y'all were right about the Agency's little meeting room/treasury. It was full of poisonous gas that was heavier than normal air, and the whole place was designed to keep that stuff trapped there. Funny thing is. It wouldn't have killed Vickers. Least not for a few more months. Yall know enough to know why. Just gotta think about it.

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That's all I got for you guys in this INFODUMP chapter. We'll be resuming tomorrow and MAYBE Saturday. Chapter 200 (yay me) is gonna be FIGHT NIGHT!

And if yall think James was OP before, just remember that in most of the fights he's been in up until now, he's been either too weak (magically) or too inexperienced to actually use his full skill set.

That aint gonna be the case in this next chapter. Shit's gonna go off the rails.

Queue up whatever anime sakuga scene music you want. Or heavy metal. Or hardcore, OG West Coast (none of that weak ass east coast garbage) gangster rap you like to listen to during fight sequences and boss fights.

Because that same thing I said about James's fighting style..... is gonna be applied to my fight scene writing style.

Looking forward to writing it guys. Still have no idea when we're gonna replace the question mark in the title numbers.

[\[Back to the story\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wh74de/wait_is_this_just_gate_200/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (1/?)

Writers note: everyone else is doing ISEKAI stories, why not me too? And who knows, maybe this time i'll actually keep a story going for a change.

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James was not having a good time. In fact, he was pretty sure that he was either tripping on drugs, or that something terrible had happened and he had some kind of brain damage. And he didn't remember doing any drugs recently, so that pointed towards the latter.

He was half right in this regard, something terrible had happened.

Here's what he knew:

Just moments ago, himself, SGT Adeke "Odie" Odikowe, and CPL Paul "Batty" Batista had been chilling in their STRYKER3 on guard duty outside their FOB at NTC.

Some kind of green light had begun glowing all over them and the Stryker. It had lasted maybe ten seconds. He'd thought maybe some of the guys had been fucking with them. Maybe even the OPFOR guys.

He was still inside of the STRYKER3, but only part of it. So was Sarge. And so was Batty's right leg. Sarge was screaming, he was pretty sure he was too.

They were screaming because they were currently living through one of the most traumatizing scenes from one of his favorite childhood movies.

It was the Tunnel Scene from the original Willy Wonka movie.

Only there was no Gene Wilder giving a crazy monologue. There was no river of chocolate. No Golden Tickets.

There was just him and Sarge screaming and shitting themselves while a kaleidoscope of lights and images flew past their windshield. He couldn't take his eyes off of the windshield long enough to look out the side windows. But he didn't want to anyways.

He knew about sensory overload. His little brother was on the spectrum, so he'd seen first hand what a person looked like when there was too much going on for them. It had taken years to figure out what would and wouldn't overload Joey. Now he was getting a first hand crash course in what that must've been like.

There was a noise, he couldn't comprehend what it was. Like a train running by outside while it's horn is blowing, only it was coming from every direction, and it kept changing tone. Something in his mind said that he was being spoken to. But there were no words, at least not that he could understand.

There were lights shifting through every color he could imagine, and several that he felt certain were actually outside the visible spectrum, but he was looking at them, and it made his eyes ache. They were flashing in patterns that would have made the raves he used to go to while still in high school look tame. If he'd been epileptic he would've been having a seizure, and who knows, maybe he was.

And the images. God the images. He saw things that he thought would have fit in history documentaries, news specials, national geographic specials, and more. But the subject of some of the images were so fantastical, and bizarre that they could've only come from the fever dreams of some sci-fi visionary. Geiger, Tolkien, Cronenberg, Aasimov, whoever made the care bears. Things that looked real but couldn't be.

All of these were going on at once. His brain felt like it was straining to escape his skull. He felt something wet under his nose. But he was so preoccupied that that information became a footnote in his mind.

And then, with no warning whatsoever, it all changed. Suddenly he was looking at a stone wall with a small window in it.

And then they were falling.

It wasn't far, maybe ten feet. But the STRYKER had originally been on the ground, so they weren't exactly braced for an impact. The fact that most of the STRYKER was now missing only made it worse, as he was now unexpectedly looking at the ceiling.

Wait, a ceiling? He thought. Before the hatch next to him was hit by something. Suddenly a small, sharp, metallic object was wedged between the frame of the STRYKER and the hatch. *Oh shit, they're trying to get in.*

"SARGE! THEY'RE TRYING TO GET IN!" He yelled. But when he looked the Sargeant wasn't moving. *Shit, he must've passed out.*

James looked back to see what had happened to batty, only to be greeted by the sight of a small pool of blood, and a severed right leg.

"WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?!?!"

Another hit happened on the hatch, and he looked back in time to see another intruder prying under the edge of the hatch. *Wait? why does that look like the tip of a sword?*

He drew the pistol from the chest holster MOLLE'd to the front of his vest. Then he saw the shadow that was in front of, *we're sideways so I guess technically it's on top of us now,* the front windshield.

Whatever it was, it was huge. It was wearing armor. It had a spear aimed right at him. And he had no idea how well a windshield made to stop .50 cal rounds would be against a spear. That info hadn't been in any of the power-points during AIT.

Luckily it seemed that the .50 cal rating meant that it was spear-proof too. The spear skidded off the windshield, leaving a long scratch and throwing the armored figure off balance. Meanwhile the hatch was starting to show some light around the edge. He undid his seat belt, and began sliding down towards Odie, pistol remaining trained on the hatch.

"SARGE WAKE THE FUCK UP! THEY'RE GETTING IN!!!" But Odie gave no sign of hearing him. He bit his left glove and pulled it off, then reached down to check for a pulse.

Then the windshield exploded.

Wait, what the fuck? He turned just in time to dodge the spear as it stabbed past his left ear. He raised his pistol and fired three shots straight into the armored figure. It fell back, blood spraying from the holes in it's chest plate. He felt Odie grasping at his arm.

"SARGE WE GOTTA-" But when he looked back, he saw what the spear had been aimed at. It was embedded in Odie's neck. Blood was pouring from around it, and out of the sargeant's mouth. The pain must have woken him up. His eyes were frantic, and he was trying to talk. But the spear and the blood muted him. So he just struggled to grab a hold of James' sleeve.

James was frozen. He didn't know what to do. He didn't know what he could do.

He reached down, dropping the pistol, and began trying to hold the sergeant's neck closed with his hands. But there was just too much blood. It seemed like it was everywhere. Odie's hands were getting more frantic in their attempts to grab him. But they were also getting weaker. His eyes were starting to lose focus, slowly rolling to back to look towards the vehicle's ceiling. Tears were rolling down James' cheeks.

"COME ON SARGE! DON'T DO THIS!"

And then James felt himself get pulled by the back of his vest. Pulled through the now opened hatch and out of the STRYKER. Pulled away from the dying Sargeant.

Then he felt an impact on the side of his head, and he was out.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/q90o27/wait_is_this_just_gate_2/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (355/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1381rjy/wait_is_this_just_gate_354/)

Writer's note: Gentle reminder that the world of Petravus has a different atmospheric composition than ours (albeit only barely) and also slightly more gravity.

That's my excuse for the iffy fall time in this chapter and IDK how nerdy yall get. I'm stickin to it.

Enjoy.

\~

James was sitting out on one of the observation decks enjoying some pastries when he heard it.

Gorna was sitting a few spaces over, resting on a chair made specifically for centaurs and other quadrupedal people. Her ears perking up and angling upwards were what alerted him that something was coming.

The prince's soldiers, most of them on the deck being griffin riders themselves, began to move about almost as one as a low vibrating hum came from above.

"Rider dropping!" One of the sergeants yelled as the sat in a chair that was almost lying down, looking up through a pair of massive spyglasses that were affixed over it. "North East and three off! Wrestling a black and red!"

"Confirmed!" Another soldier somewhere else yelled, and James saw them in a similar setup on the other side of the deck.

"What's that noise?" James asked even as he pulled out his scouting glasses and powered them on.

"Screamer whistles." One of the nearby soldiers, a relatively young human with the shortcut hair of a fresh recruit. "They attach them to themselves so we know when they're falling."

"Is it the princess?" Gorna asked. But the soldiers at the spyglass chairs ignored her.

"Status!" The watch captain, a large orc, demanded as he stepped up onto the deck.

"Looks like Krom!" One of the observers said. "Blonde hair! Not large enough to be the prince!"

"Whoever they are they're in a spin!" The other informed them. "Either they have one of the wings bound or there's a problem!"

The Captain walked over to one of the rails at the side of the deck.

"CATCH TEAMS! PREP FOR INTERCEPTION! WE'VE GOT A RIDER BREAKING!" He yelled. There was a chorus of yells and cries of confirmation as the first of a wing of riders took to the air and moved up. "NORTH EAST AND THREE OFF!" He added. The first of the riders waved understanding and began to climb.

"Where's Amina?" James asked under his breath as he used the controls on the side of his glasses to zoom in and try to spot her. "Come onnnnnn."

\---------------------------

Amina grunted as she slammed into a wing, causing the griffin it belonged to to screech in surprise as she did. The impact put her into a spin and she released a burst of air from her hand to correct her path. But the surprised griffin's cries had startled the other griffins into new paths too.

She looked for her mark as she regained her sense of direction. It had re-angled and she burst more air out to match.

But the griffins were aware of an intruder now. Or rather a second intruder, since Krom had already made his leap. And they began to roll to get a visual on the newcomer.

Talons began to flex and beaks began to snap as she plummeted past them.

Then the blue, green, and brown griffin that she desired rolled in a spin and looked right at her.

The two of them locked eyes for what, in her magic enhanced vision, felt like minutes.

Like all the other griffins it looked angry. Then it seemed to realize where she was heading and she saw surprise as its eyes widened.

That's right. She thought. *You're already mine.*

The griffin beat its wings and writhed in mid-air, doing everything it could to get out of her path. But Amina saw it all occur in slow motion, and before it could even get the first beat completed to massive blasts of wind emanated from her hands and propelled her forward.

The griffin screeched as she slammed into its ribs like a cannon shot. Her hands flew to her belt in a blur and quickly scrambled to grab the first set of restraints out and around its neck.

BANG!

Amina jerked back in shock as the creature's massive beak snapped shut just to the side of her head with a noise that sounded eerily like James's pistol being fired. She climbed like a spider over the bests side, dodging thrashing talons as she held onto handfuls of fur and feathers with a death grip.

The two of them rolled like that for what felt like an eternity. For so long that the swarm faded back behind them.

When it snapped at her again she used the motion to trick it into biting the small net webbing she'd been given, and scrambled to strap it behind the things neck. The buckle, while decently large, was too finicky to deal with right now. So she settled for holding the two opposing ends in her hand, wrapped around the shoulder that had grown used to the pulling of her animated shield. Her legs gripped the griffin's ribs harder than she'd ever clamped onto a horse or a tamed griffin before.

And the two of them continued to plummet as they each struggled for control of each other.

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"Second rider!" The second of the two observers called. "Same direction! Two in!"

"Confirmed! And third rider following!" The first observer said. "First one is wrestling! Third is lone! I think it's the prince!"

"Is it Amina?" James asked, and was once again ignored. He was reminded of times when random LT's had tried to interfere in the engine bay back on Earth and been ignored by the NCO's and Chiefs that had been waist deep in engine parts and power tools. He was an interloper in this event. An observer who could only slow these soldiers down in their job.

But the captain took pity on him. "It has to be." He said sternly with an annoyed look as James looked at him. "The third one is the prince, who can fly. The rest of the climbers have already either been retrieved or signaled that they were climbing back down at their own pace. That only leaves her."

"Is she okay?" James asked as he scanned the sky with his glasses. It took a minute, but he did find her.

"That is between her and the griffin." The captain said as he went to the opposing side of the deck from before. "SECOND TEAM! GO!"

\----------

Amina felt a flash of pain, and had to hold onto the improvised reins as one of the griffins rear legs racked at her leg. She looked down for a moment and saw three long, but remarkably clean, lines of torn leather with blood seeping down the side.

She let go with her legs, letting herself free-fall for a few seconds as she held on with only the straps in her hands tying the two of them together.

The griffin thrashed and spun, making her dizzy as it did, doing everything it could to get rid of her as it also clawed at the ropes and straps around its face.

Amina waited for it to initiate another diving spin before pulling her self back in quickly. This time she impacted closer to her goal, landing just off center of the griffin's back and causing it to squawk in surprise and frustration. As she did she threw one of the weighted ropes at the wing that was further away from her, spinning it as she did. She cursed herself as it sailed just past the wing and off into the open air. Even as she did, the wing closest to her beat at her rapidly. If Kraug the Orc had decided to repeatedly slam his massive arms into her, it would have been more pleasant. Her injured leg screamed in pain as she forced it to snake around the offending wing and attempt to pin it.

"AMINAAAA!!!" Someone shouted from above them. "YOU HAVE TO BIND THEM!"

She didn't hear it. Not through the rushing wind, screeching beast, and screaming whistles. Or above the blood pounding through her ears.

She grabbed another of the weighted lines. She had three left, and needed a minimum of two to succeed. All the while the wing thrashed against the arm and leg that were attempting to pin it in place. Though the arm in question was also still holding the straps that restrained the griffin's head.

And the ground was rising towards them.

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"Sergeant Krom is clear sir!" One of the observers reported, though James stopped listening as soon as he heard the name.

"Come on." He said as he watched his wife and the griffin she was wrestling with continue to plummet. The range finder on his readout couldn't even get a reading on how far she was. And it was supposedly rated for up to three kilometers. And his view of her was so heavily pixelated from zooming in that he couldn't ACTUALLY see her clearly.

What he could see was that she and the griffin were tumbling end over end. He could also see the black winged form of the prince plummeting after them and circling them as he matched their speed. He wondered why the prince wasn't helping her.

If he hadn't been so focused on her he would have noticed the way Gorna and Glag began to look at him curiously. The bottoms of his feet were beginning to glow and flutter as magical energy instinctively began concentrating on them.

"Come on Aminaaaaaa."

\----------

Amina had been mid throw when the Griffin headbutted her. She'd opted to keep one end of the line in her hand this time, and that was the only thing that let her keep attached to the monstrous hybrid.

She had a split second's warning as she felt the makeshift reins go slack in her hand. But by then she'd already been releasing the weighted line to wrap around the unrestrained wing.

The griffin's head slammed into her in an impact so ferocious it reminded her of how Glag had sent her flying in the arena. Something popped somewhere and she would have screamed in pain if she hadn't also felt her consciousness fade out for a moment. Her left hand let go of the straps it had been holding onto. It's fingers limp and prickling with numbness

But her left hand kept a hold of its end of the rope, which had successfully wrapped around the base of the opposing wing.

The griffin rolled in a spin, effectively reeling her back into it without realizing. It screeched in fury at the sight of her coming towards it again, and lashed out with one of the claws that wasn't entangled in the netting that it had just removed from its face. The slash attempted to catch her in the side of the ribs. But her numb, and likely dislocated, arm intercepted it without her even consciously telling it to.

The pain brought her back to full consciousness.

Amina's eyes blazed with golden light as she turned to face the source of her pain. Her throat shone bright with the purplish pink light of her family's voice of command power.

She yelled a cry of fury at the griffin, which cringed back in surprise and pain at the sudden verbal onslaught. Amina took advantage of the sudden opportunity and wrapped her wounded legs around one wing in a sort of modified arm hold. Her good arm pinned the other between itself and her waist, and in a battle-rage she hadn't felt since the battle in the dessert, she fought the beast.

Even Alixan, who had made to move in and retrieve her at the sight of the impact, fell back as she screamed and struggled at the monster for control.

There were no ropes or straps or harnesses. No weapons save their own bodies.

In those last few thousand feet there was only a wounded and half mad warrior, and a suddenly very frightened griffin.

And they each fought for their lives.

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Of all the people present on the observation deck, James flinched the least at the sudden sound from above. He had, after all, heard Amina use this power before. He wouldn't be surprised if the local soldiers had heard the prince use that power. But this wasn't the prince. It was Amina.

And James knew how she sounded when she got pissed.

"YOU WILL OBEY ME YOU BASTARD!" Came echoing down from above.

"Bleedin' hells!" One of the soldiers said. "Those two are goin' at it."

And as James watched, reeling back the zoom in his glasses at an increasing rate and glad to gain more clarity, he saw that they were right.

Murmurs rose among the soldiers present as they watched the three bodies continue to plummet.

James's face paled as he saw the flashes of red on Amina's clothes. The familiar red of blood. And knew that that was what had driven her to rage like she was doing now.

"BLEED ME NO MORE!" He heard her bellow as he saw her head flash forward and strike the side of the griffin's face in a headbutt.

"Too low!" Someone exclaimed nearby.

James killed the feed on his left lens and was surprised to see that she couldn't be more than four or five hundred feet above them now.

He saw the already dispatched wing of riders moving to intercept.

He ripped the glasses from his head and tossed them at Gorna, who jumped back in confusion at the unexpected projectile hitting her, and began to run toward the edge of the deck so he could jump off.

Then he faltered and tripped as he saw something amazing.

"YOU ARE MINE!!!!!!" Amina yelled as a set of massive, shimmering, blue and green wings opened up wide above them.

The soldiers all around began to go wide eyed and oohed and aah-ed as a massive, fan-like, tail spread wide behind the griffin. It was supported every few feet by long furred portions that made it look like it was

actually many tails in one. Between them were long trailing feathers matching the wings. It looked like it had eyes spread all across it.

James looked up from where he'd fallen to his knees, and was amazed at the sight of the creature.

"It's a damn peacock." He said to himself, though he couldn't recognize the feline parts of the griffin just yet.

They sailed over the grounds, only maybe two hundred feet up now. Way too close for James's liking.

"The princess is clear sir!" One of the observers yelled.

"No shite Malliers!" The guard captain shot back angrily. "We can all see that!" This drew some mild laughter from some of the soldiers.

The laughter quickly stopped as they all watched Amina slump over and fall off the griffin.

James left scorched splinters where his feet exploded, propelling him into the air.

Wait, is this just GATE? (354/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1373blq/wait_is_this_just_gate_353/)

Writer's note: Hmmm. Maybe James has been a bad influence on his wife.

Enjoy.

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"WHATEVER YOU DO!" Alixan shouted down at Amina and the only other climber between his legs. "DON'T LOOK AT THEM! IF THEY SEE YOUR EYES THEY'LL ATTACK!"

Around them, and around the spire, the seemingly endless flock of griffins roiled like the rapids of a fast moving river. She knew from looking up through a small spyglass that they were weaving in and out of each others ways, not always successfully, in a flurry of feathers, fur, and razor sharp beaks and claws. The noise of their screeches and screams and squawks was so loud that even with her ears plugged and covered by cloth her head was beginning to hurt.

A little over two hundred yards. She reminded herself as she felt something rush past her, and buffet her with its wings slightly in the process, before slamming into something else. There was a screech of fury and she felt the impact of something slamming into the cliff off to her side. She huddled against it, holding onto her handholds and making herself as small as she could while doing what she could to resist her curiosity and look at what had happened. *Two hundred yards.*

Alixan had given them the rules for being in the swarm as they'd doused themselves in the, incredibly vile, griffin urine that morning. No making eye contact, even accidentally with any of the beasts. Move slow, practically at a snail's pace, while climbing and ensure that you never have less than three tie off points at a time. No food, no water. And if a griffin hit you assume that you were already dead, because it would mean that they'd collided with another griffin and a fight would break out.

Though he'd assured them that that last part was rare. Not the fights. Those happened all the time up here. But them actually striking a rider were rare. That fact didn't comfort Amina at all as she felt something wet and hot land on the rock next to her and splash her hand a bit. One of the griffin's had blooded the other gruesomely, and she'd caught some of the spray.

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But she continued climbing.

Small handhold after small handhold. Freezing in place anytime something happened nearby. Repositioning tie off points. Occasionally stopping to stretch a hand or a leg as slowly and deliberately as possible.

It took six hours and thirty three minutes to get the two hundred or so yards that were necessary for them to get past the swarm.

She never saw a reason for WHY the swarm flew where it did. No food source or water supply. No magical artifact or energy source. Not even any places that might have made comfortable resting spots for the massive hybrid animals. Just cliff face. She supposed it was possible that there was one on the other side of the spire. But she wasn't exactly going to go look.

And yet at the two hundred yard mark the swarm just stopped, as if there was some kind of hidden barrier that they as non-griffins couldn't see. There was still another mile or so of spire above them on the other side of it. But nothing else. The griffin's tooth seemed almost featureless beyond that point. Save for a small respite that, as she got into it and saw Alixan's smiling face, she realized must have been carved there by other aspiring griffin riders. There were even small simple chairs, a somewhat ragged looking tent that reminded her of James's yurt in the Clan Drakrid town, and a small fire pit over which hung a cooking surface.

To her surprise the other climber was sitting there with Alixan, enjoying a warm cup of tea and some jerky with him.

"Knew you'd make it." Alixan said. He gestured at one of the small chairs and pulled a rag out of a metal bucket that sat next to the fire. "Come. Change out of those clothes and wash the scent off as best you can. We're almost done up here."

"What is this place?" She asked as she moved over and took the rag. The elf's eyes went wide as she pulled her coat and pants off without hesitation. She still had her small clothes on underneath, but she had to imagine that he hadn't expected to see a princess undress in front of him. Even though he'd clearly already cleaned himself off before she'd even gotten here.

"The reason I decided to make this hold my home." Alixan answered as he poured her a cup of tea and tossed her sullied coat into a bottomless bag to be cleaned later. "I don't know what it was originally called. Or who first carved it out of the spire. Or HOW they did so without causing it to collapse." He said as he looked up at the curved back wall. "And noone knows why the griffins stay below it."

She looked as she wiped down her arms and shoulders with the clothe, dipping it in the warm water occasionally as she did. Sure enough the griffins continued to avoid this altitude. A head or wing or claw would occasionally break the surface of the teeming mass of the swarm. But they were always quick to dive back down when they did. And despite the cacophony she'd heard while moving THROUGH the swarm, she heard hardly a low din from in here.

"The griffin riders call it the Respite." Alixan said. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the tent. "Some of that magical jade is in there. Like the stuff from Jadesport. Or James's medallion. Makes up the floor of the tent. But it's PART of the spire."

"Up here?" She asked. "How's that possible?"

"Don't know." Alixan admitted. "It must've been here long before any of the past cataclysms that resulted in lost records too. Because I've looked for answers." He said.

"It's a nice color too." The elf said. "And feels warm to touch."

Alixan nodded. "It's why it isn't cold up here." He said. "Not the fire. Though that helps."

"What's at the top of the spire?" She asked as she hesitantly peered out around the top of the respite. Her nausea kicked in and she quickly stepped back.

"No idea." Alixan said with a sullen sip of his tea. "Tried climbing a few times. But if you think the air's thin here. Get's a lot worse up there. And as you can see griffins won't go up there."

"Has anyone?" The elf asked curiously.

Alixan shrugged. "Like I said. No idea."

Amina looked at him curiously as she pulled a shirt from her bag and put it on, then began cleaning her legs. She'd have to get her back and hair whenever they got back to the bottom.

"You're going up there aren't you?" She asked. "That's part of the reason you came up."

He chuckled. "You always knew me so well Mina." He said. Then he looked up at the edge of the shelter. "Yes.... I am." He said. "Once you two have leaped. Good or bad. I intend to use that.... Oxygen.... magic that James told us about. I've been training on it for quite a while now." He shook his head. "Hasn't worked in the Crag yet. But that gas is magical in nature so that's not a shock. This might be too. But I won't know for sure until I try."

Amina sighed. Her older brother had always had a tendency for climbing that had never made any sense to any of them.

"So what do we do now?" She asked as she laced her boots up, forgoing the simple leather shoes they'd all worn for the climb in favor of something with a bit more protection.

"You sure you're ready?" He asked. "You just barely got up here."

"I could go for a nice nap." The elf said. "Course I could also stand not being miles above the ground right above a swarm of bloodthirsty monsters too. But we all make bad decisions from time to time."

"Sergeant Krom you asked for this trip specifically." Alixan said with a hint of annoyed confusion.

"Yeeeeeaaaahh." The elf sighed. "I'm not the brightest. Plus I finally got over losin' my boy Hardbite. Figured it was time to get back in the saddle. Kinda forgot how awful this whole thing is. Don't think my husband's gonna let me do another of these trips before our century is up."

Alixan stared at the elf with mild exasperation. Then he turned back to Amina and guided her over to the edge. He pointed down at the swarm.

"Next up is the leap." He said. "Krom already knows that. He's done it before."

"Okay" She said. "I assume you're being literal."

"Very." He answered readily.

"That's a terrible plan." She said.

"Griffins can't be snuck up on from the ground." He said. "Or from the side. Sometimes you can lure them somewhere and trap them. But that runs a high risk of hurting them. They're accustomed to being the only thing in the sky besides the various dragons that can take each other on. And most dragons don't care to eat them when there's easier prey on the ground. So they aren't terribly accustomed to being attacked from above."

"So I'm going to jump down on top of one and what? Just hope like hell it doesn't try to kill me?"

"Oh it's definitely going to try to kill you." He said with a laugh. "That's where being an elite, royal, warrior comes into play. Bring out the bag we gave you." He instructed her. "Krom. Come help me show her what to do."

Krom drained the last of his tea and walked over, bag in hand. Over the next few minutes the two of them explained what to do with the series of straps and weighted ropes once she'd engaged a griffin. They had her run through a couple of trials with throwing the ones that needed throwing, and tying the ones that would need to be secured. When they were done she stood near the ledge with the tools in hand.

"You have an advantage." Alixan said. "Krom here is going in blind and hoping he gets one he likes. You have battle sight. You'll be able to pick one, assuming you can time the jump right. Has James shown you how to fly like he does?"

"A bit." She answered. "I can use wind magic to redirect myself. But the explosion thing is still a bit much."

Alixan nodded. "That ought to be enough to make a difference." He said. Then he looked down at the swarm. "Last chance to back out." He said quietly enough that Krom wouldn't hear. "No harm."

Then Krom screamed.

"FOR HARDBIIIIIIIiiiiiiittttteeee!" He roared as he flew out off the ledge and into the void. A series of shrill whistles following his voice out into the open air.

"Guess he got bored." Alixan said with a chuckle." Alixan said. "That reminds me. We almost let you jump without putting the screamer whistles on. Get those out." He said as he moved over to put out the fire and dump out the remaining water in the bucket.

"Is he going to be okay?" She asked as she tried spotting the elf in the swarm below to no avail.

"Krom?" Alixan asked over his shoulder. "Yeah. He's done this like... six times? Maybe seven... in his life. His husband just isn't a fan of them. And he bonded real hard with his last griffin. Hit him hard when it passed away. We'll see him back at the keep."

Then he spun as he heard more whistles screaming out over the edge.

"AMINA!" He yelled as he dashed back to the edge and dove over it after her.

She didn't hear him. By the time he got to the edge of the respite her world had already become a madness of wings and talons and noise again.

She could see the blue and green and brown beast with the long trailing tail that she desired.

And she was plummeting right towards its flight path.

Just like so many times before, as she'd charged into battles, and duels, and challenges. All her doubts melted away before her. There was no time for them now. No place for them now. Later, when things were settled, one way or the other, if she still lived, she could break down and process them. But for now. There was her, a seemingly endless swarm of griffins, several miles of open air, and the one that she wanted to make hers.

She smiled as she saw it continue flying forward, oblivious of the approach of its new master.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (354/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/137385g/wait_is_this_just_gate_353/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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"What is this place?" She asked as she moved over and took the rag. The elf's eyes went wide as she pulled her coat and pants off without

hesitation. She still had her small clothes on underneath, but she had to imagine that he hadn't expected to see a princess undress in front of him. Even though he'd clearly already cleaned himself off before she'd even gotten here.

"The reason I decided to make this hold my home." Alixan answered as he poured her a cup of tea and tossed her sullied coat into a bottomless bag to be cleaned later. "I don't know what it was originally called. Or who first carved it out of the spire. Or HOW they did so without causing it to collapse." He said as he looked up at the curved back wall. "And noone knows why the griffins stay below it."

She looked as she wiped down her arms and shoulders with the clothe, dipping it in the warm water occasionally as she did. Sure enough the griffins continued to avoid this altitude. A head or wing or claw would occasionally break the surface of the teeming mass of the swarm. But they were always quick to dive back down when they did. And despite the cacophony she'd heard while moving THROUGH the swarm, she heard hardly a low din from in here.

"The griffin riders call it the Respite." Alixan said. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the tent. "Some of that magical jade is in there. Like the stuff from Jadesport. Or James's medallion. Makes up the floor of the tent. But it's PART of the spire."

"Up here?" She asked. "How's that possible?"

"Don't know." Alixan admitted. "It must've been here long before any of the past cataclysms that resulted in lost records too. Because I've looked for answers." He said.

"It's a nice color too." The elf said. "And feels warm to touch."

Alixan nodded. "It's why it isn't cold up here." He said. "Not the fire. Though that helps."

"What's at the top of the spire?" She asked as she hesitantly peered out around the top of the respite. Her nausea kicked in and she quickly stepped back.

"No idea." Alixan said with a sullen sip of his tea. "Tried climbing a few times. But if you think the air's thin here. Get's a lot worse up there. And as you can see griffins won't go up there."

"Has anyone?" The elf asked curiously.

Alixan shrugged. "Like I said. No idea."

Amina looked at him curiously as she pulled a shirt from her bag and put it on, then began cleaning her legs. She'd have to get her back and hair whenever they got back to the bottom.

"You're going up there aren't you?" She asked. "That's part of the reason you came up."

He chuckled. "You always knew me so well Mina." He said. Then he looked up at the edge of the shelter. "Yes.... I am." He said. "Once you two have leaped. Good or bad. I intend to use that.... Oxygen.... magic that James told us about. I've been training on it for quite a while now." He shook his head. "Hasn't worked in the Crag yet. But that gas is magical in nature so that's not a shock. This might be too. But I won't know for sure until I try."

Amina sighed. Her older brother had always had a tendency for climbing that had never made any sense to any of them.

"So what do we do now?" She asked as she laced her boots up, forgoing the simple leather shoes they'd all worn for the climb in favor of something with a bit more protection.

"You sure you're ready?" He asked. "You just barely got up here."

"I could go for a nice nap." The elf said. "Course I could also stand not being miles above the ground right above a swarm of bloodthirsty monsters too. But we all make bad decisions from time to time."

"Sergeant Krom you asked for this trip specifically." Alixan said with a hint of annoyed confusion.

"Yeeeeeaaaahh." The elf sighed. "I'm not the brightest. Plus I finally got over losin' my boy Hardbite. Figured it was time to get back in the saddle. Kinda forgot how awful this whole thing is. Don't think my husband's gonna let me do another of these trips before our century is up."

Alixan stared at the elf with mild exasperation. Then he turned back to Amina and guided her over to the edge. He pointed down at the swarm.

"Next up is the leap." He said. "Krom already knows that. He's done it before."

"Okay" She said. "I assume you're being literal."

"Very." He answered readily.

"That's a terrible plan." She said.

"Griffins can't be snuck up on from the ground." He said. "Or from the side. Sometimes you can lure them somewhere and trap them. But that runs a high risk of hurting them. They're accustomed to being the only thing in the sky besides the various dragons that can take each other on. And most dragons don't care to eat them when there's easier prey on the ground. So they aren't terribly accustomed to being attacked from above."

"So I'm going to jump down on top of one and what? Just hope like hell it doesn't try to kill me?"

"Oh it's definitely going to try to kill you." He said with a laugh. "That's where being an elite, royal, warrior comes into play. Bring out the bag we gave you." He instructed her. "Krom. Come help me show her what to do."

Krom drained the last of his tea and walked over, bag in hand. Over the next few minutes the two of them explained what to do with the series of straps and weighted ropes once she'd engaged a griffin. They had her run through a couple of trials with throwing the ones that needed throwing, and tying the ones that would need to be secured. When they were done she stood near the ledge with the tools in hand.

"You have an advantage." Alixan said. "Krom here is going in blind and hoping he gets one he likes. You have battle sight. You'll be able to pick one, assuming you can time the jump right. Has James shown you how to fly like he does?"

"A bit." She answered. "I can use wind magic to redirect myself. But the explosion thing is still a bit much."

Alixan nodded. "That ought to be enough to make a difference." He said. Then he looked down at the swarm. "Last chance to back out." He said quietly enough that Krom wouldn't hear. "No harm."

Then Krom screamed.

"FOR HARDBIIIIIIIIiiiiiii^(ttttteeee!") He roared as he flew out off the ledge and into the void. A series of shrill whistles following his voice out into the open air.

"Guess he got bored." Alixan said with a chuckle." Alixan said. "That reminds me. We almost let you jump without putting the screamer whistles on. Get those out." He said as he moved over to put out the fire and dump out the remaining water in the bucket.

"Is he going to be okay?" She asked as she tried spotting the elf in the swarm below to no avail.

"Krom?" Alixan asked over his shoulder. "Yeah. He's done this like... six times? Maybe seven... in his life. His husband just isn't a fan of them. And he bonded real hard with his last griffin. Hit him hard when it passed away. We'll see him back at the keep."

Then he spun as he heard more whistles screaming out over the edge.

"AMINA!" He yelled as he dashed back to the edge and dove over it after her.

She didn't hear him. By the time he got to the edge of the respite her world had already become a madness of wings and talons and noise again.

She could see the blue and green and brown beast with the long trailing tail that she desired.

And she was plummeting right towards its flight path.

Just like so many times before, as she'd charged into battles, and duels, and challenges. All her doubts melted away before her. There was no time for them now. No place for them now. Later, when things were settled, one way or the other, if she still lived, she could break down and process them. But for now. There was her, a seemingly endless swarm of griffins, several miles of open air, and the one that she wanted to make hers.

She smiled as she saw it continue flying forward, oblivious of the approach of its new master.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1394a9s/wait_is_this_just_gate_355/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (353/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1362z2t/wait_is_this_just_gate_352/)

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He said with a jab of his finger at the paper, which Vickers assumed was the roster of fake soldiers.

"On my life your majesty!" She said as she stood and saluted. King Farrick jerked his head toward the door and she nodded before jogging out of the door to her task.

"Spymaster Telderin?" The King said.

Vickers had to fight the urge to leap out of his skin as a breathy voice emanated from the seat next to him, which had been empty only a second before.

"Yes your majesty?" Said a hooded figure whose face Vickers couldn't see.

"Chief Vickers is considered his people's foremost covert operative." The King replied. "The two werefolk that are his charges are of a similar nature. Coordinate with them to enact the plan to COVERTLY extract our citizens. Chief Vickers I assume this operation would be agreeable to you?"

Both Vickers and the hooded figure nodded. Then they seemed to disappear right before Vickers' eyes. One second they were there, then they simply weren't. Vickers hadn't even heard them move. Nor had he smelled their presence. He stared at the now empty seat with wide feline eyes.

"I would check your pockets Chief." The King said. "Please go relay this information to your compatriots."

Vickers nodded awkwardly and fought not to let his confusion and anger show as he got up and left the room.

As he walked out he did what he'd been told and, sure enough, there was something in his chest pocket. The one that was UNDERNEATH his modified MOLLE vest.

He opened the small paper and read the incredibly small, yet clear, handwriting. Though he was amazed to find that it was written in English.

>One of my agents shall meet you at the quarters of your companions at sundown.Also, well chosen with your were-folk form. Very suitable for a fellow shadow.

Vickers disliked being one-upped at his own craft. He grumbled angrily to himself as the piece of paper disappeared in a small cloud of orange smoke, leaving not a trace of its existence behind.

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Amina reached up to the hand and grasped it as she finally managed to get to the end of the nesting area.

"Well done sister." Alixan said as he pulled her into the small cove he'd started a small fire in. "That's enough for tonight. We'll continue in the morning."

It was clearly an old griffin nest, though it was empty of any of the fluff, feathers, or dry shrub that seemed to be the standard for the nests. She took a moment to catch her breath as she scooted away from the edge of the opening.

"I guess I'm the first." She said. "Besides you."

"Only one more left." He replied. "The northern lad turned around after a rather large mother griffin took a swipe at him. Can't blame him. She looked meaner than most."

"Is that level of washout normal?" She asked. She probably should have asked before starting the climb, she realized as she said it.

"Actually, two out of six is better than normal." He said with a smile. "And nobody has even fallen off yet."

"Quite dangerous." She said.

"I figured you knew that when you heard me explain that you'd be climbing a three mile tall spire, through griffin nesting grounds, and then leaping off of it and hoping to land on a griffin. Followed by doing everything you can to NOT get killed by one before you hit the ground." He said, and was correct.

"I shouldn't be up here." She said glumly. She felt like a fool.

"No. Probably not." Alixan agreed.

"Then why did you let me join you?" She asked.

"Because you're a grown woman."

"I'm pregnant." She countered.

"Does that make you LESS of a grown woman?" He asked. "Because I'm fairly certain it doesn't."

"This is dangerous." She said somewhat sheepishly.

"Yes. We've already covered that part." He agreed again.

"What if something happens to me. Or to the baby?" She wondered.

"Firstly." He began. "You being pregnant is the only reason I came on this climb." He said as he offered her a bit of dried fruit, which she took greedily. "I'm not going to let anything happen to you little sister. And especially not to my future nephew."

"Nephew?" She wondered curiously. "How do you know its a boy?"

He chuckled, happy to see that he'd distracted her from her worry, even if only temporarily.

"I don't." He replied with a smile. "Just hopeful. It's James's child so I'm already braced to be disappointed by it being short once it grows up. Might as well hope its a boy."

She slugged him on the shoulder and he donned a fake shocked expression.

"My child will never be a disappointment. Height aside." She said with a bit of genuine anger.

Alixan raised his hands in surrender. "Poor choice of words. You're right of course." Then he turned serious again. "But really Mina." He said. "I'll be right there with you the rest of the way. And you know what I can do. If anything happens, I'll get you- BOTH of you, out without harm."

"Can't guarantee that." She replied.

He shook his head. "No." He agreed. "No there's no guarantees in this kind of thing. But I can be fairly certain."

"Why'd you let me come up?" She asked.

"I told you." He reminded her. "You're a grown woman. I can't make decisions for you. Nobody can. Not even dad.... GENERAL." He said, reminding her of how she'd originally run away from home.

She thought back to when they'd all been children. She'd always thought that Artair or Xarina were the rascals of their family. But now that Alixan had so glaringly pointed it out, SHE had always been the rebellious one. She just had a stronger call to duty, and less wanderlust, than their younger siblings.

"You've officially surpassed me as the favored child." Alixan said with a smile. "I may be the crown prince. But married AND expecting a child?" He made a fake impressed face. "Not even Ferria can claim that one." He pointed out into the darkness. "Neither she or I can guide you now little sister. It's all learning experiences for you from here on out. Just like any other new parent."

"Most pregnant woman probably don't need to LEARN not to do things like this." She said, partly scolding herself as she gestured at the massive spire behind them.

"No. This was a very foolish decision." He agreed. She was about to scold him for the insult. But he continued. "But you're probably one of the few that can actually pull it off." He looked over at her as a hand came over the ledge and grasped for purchase. "In the morning." He said as he moved over to help the only other remaining climber up.

"Hope I wasn't interrupting what sounded like a very important sibling conversation." The ragged looking elf said sarcastically. "Just been climbing for my life in the dark all night."

\----------

Samantha walked with her hands fidgeting with each other inside the front pocket of her hoodie.

It was nice to be able to walk the hospital grounds more or less freely now. She knew that the cameras were keeping tabs on her. And she wouldn't be surprised if the "Long Term Guest" badge that hung from one of her hoodie's draw strings wasn't being tracked somehow. She was a former M.P. so she knew exactly how that kind of thing worked.

She paused as she got to the door she'd been walking toward this whole time. She looked around a few times and was legitimately surprised to see that the halls were empty, though a few of the other doors were open, implying that their occupants were in them.

She was about to reach up to knock but stopped.

Was she really gonna do this?

She definitely wasn't in the right headspace to be making these kinds of decisions. And she didn't exactly have the freedom to run away and hide if something went wrong. There'd be no turning back if this didn't go as she hoped it would.

Shut up and just do it. The part of her brain that wasn't 100% hers said. It... wasn't big on patience.

"Oh hell. When it's right it's right." She said as she reached up again and knocked.

"Come in!" The familiar voice said. She grasped the handle and pulled the door open.

"Hi." She said as she entered.

"Samantha." Fletcher said as he saw her. He had a small smile on his face as he turned from his computer to face her. "How are you? Come on in." He said with a gesture at the seats opposite of him. "Something I can help you with?"

"Uhhh." She said as her brain suddenly stopped existing. All the plans and imagined conversations she'd had to prepare for this point immediately evaporated as she grasped at brain cells that had stopped functioning. "Yes?" She said as she sat awkwardly in one of the seats.

How is it that YOU lead a pack? Her wolf instincts wondered. *So indecisive.*

"What can I do for you?" Fletcher asked.

"WOULDYOUGOWITHMEONMYOUTINGNEXTWEEK?!" She blurted out in a rush.

Fletcher, to his credit, had been in enough courts where things had gotten emotional or even occasionally violent, that his face only showed temporary surprise.

"What?" He asked. "Can... You repeat that?"

Samantha took a deep breath.

You should probably blink. Our eyes are probably freaking him out. Not good for gaining a mate.

SHUT UP! She yelled at her own brain.

"Would you..." She began. "Go with me..... on my outing.... next week?" She said slowly, forcing herself to keep the volume down. "My father... had to go back home so he could keep his shop open.... I have nobody... to go with."

"Um..." He said. He was blushing as he swallowed noisily. "Sure."

"Can it be a date?" She asked before she could second guess it.

Much better.

Quiet!

He swallowed again while glancing at his computer for just a moment, likely as a distraction. If he'd been blushing before, he was downright scarlet now.

"Uh... Yeah." He said with a nod. "That would be.... nice."

"Thank you." She said as she stood up and made to leave. "That's pretty much all my anxiety for the day. So I'll let you get back to work."

And right back to awful.

"I know a nice bistro." He said before she could get all the way out the door. She turned back, surprised at the outburst. He was still red. "They make an excellent filet mignon." Then he thought for a moment. "We'll have to get you some um.... formal wear though. They have a dress code. Shopping trip first?" He asked.

She smiled, though she made sure not to bare her teeth. "I'd like that." She said. "Kinda tired of the sweats."

"Then it's.... a date." He said with a hesitant smile.

She nodded and stepped out. When she did she let herself smile all the way. A passing staff member, likely another lawyer or something given

where they were, went bug eyed at the sight and sped up her pace. But Samantha didn't care.

As she walked back to her room she kept smiling, even as she scolded her own instincts.

I went my whole life with insecurity and judgment from other women. She thought at the intrusive thoughts that she'd been wrestling with ever since her transformation. ***I don't need it from my own damn brain.***

Too bad. That other part said back. *Be a better fucking wolf. Literally.*

The legal/HR department receptionist smiled at her as she walked past. "Have a nice day Miss Jenkins." She said. Samantha nodded at her as she exited the door out to the elevator hall. Then once the door closed the receptionist pulled out her cell phone.

>SCORE! She did it. They're totally a thing. Cash in everyone.

She sent the message to the group chat.

Her phone began dinging rapidly only a few seconds later.

>Munro: I'm using my winnings to buy myself some new wedges. Might get some for Samantha too. Think Versace makes them that big?

Was the first response.

Fletcher's number was NOT in that group chat.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1381rjy/wait_is_this_just_gate_354/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (353/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1362w6c/wait_is_this_just_gate_352/) /
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Vickers had to fight the urge to leap out of his skin as a breathy voice emanated from the seat next to him, which had been empty only a second before.

"Yes your majesty?" Said a hooded figure whose face Vickers couldn't see.

"Chief Vickers is considered his people's foremost covert operative." The King replied. "The two werefolk that are his charges are of a similar nature. Coordinate with them to enact the plan to COVERTLY extract our citizens. Chief Vickers I assume this operation would be agreeable to you?"

Both Vickers and the hooded figure nodded. Then they seemed to disappear right before Vickers' eyes. One second they were there, then they simply weren't. Vickers hadn't even heard them move. Nor had he smelled their presence. He stared at the now empty seat with wide feline eyes.

"I would check your pockets Chief." The King said. "Please go relay this information to your compatriots."

Vickers nodded awkwardly and fought not to let his confusion and anger show as he got up and left the room.

As he walked out he did what he'd been told and, sure enough, there was something in his chest pocket. The one that was UNDERNEATH his modified MOLLE vest.

He opened the small paper and read the incredibly small, yet clear, handwriting. Though he was amazed to find that it was written in English.

>One of my agents shall meet you at the quarters of your companions at sundown.
>
>Also, well chosen with your were-folk form. Very suitable for a fellow shadow.

Vickers disliked being one-upped at his own craft. He grumbled angrily to himself as the piece of paper disappeared in a small cloud of orange smoke, leaving not a trace of its existence behind.

\----------

Amina reached up to the hand and grasped it as she finally managed to get to the end of the nesting area.

"Well done sister." Alixan said as he pulled her into the small cove he'd started a small fire in. "That's enough for tonight. We'll continue in the morning."

It was clearly an old griffin nest, though it was empty of any of the fluff, feathers, or dry shrub that seemed to be the standard for the nests. She took a moment to catch her breath as she scooted away from the edge of the opening.

"I guess I'm the first." She said. "Besides you."

"Only one more left." He replied. "The northern lad turned around after a rather large mother griffin took a swipe at him. Can't blame him. She looked meaner than most."

"Is that level of washout normal?" She asked. She probably should have asked before starting the climb, she realized as she said it.

"Actually, two out of six is better than normal." He said with a smile. "And nobody has even fallen off yet."

"Quite dangerous." She said.

"I figured you knew that when you heard me explain that you'd be climbing a three mile tall spire, through griffin nesting grounds, and then leaping off of it and hoping to land on a griffin. Followed by doing everything you can to NOT get killed by one before you hit the ground." He said, and was correct.

"I shouldn't be up here." She said glumly. She felt like a fool.

"No. Probably not." Alixan agreed.

"Then why did you let me join you?" She asked.

"Because you're a grown woman."

"I'm pregnant." She countered.

"Does that make you LESS of a grown woman?" He asked. "Because I'm fairly certain it doesn't."

"This is dangerous." She said somewhat sheepishly.

"Yes. We've already covered that part." He agreed again.

"What if something happens to me. Or to the baby?" She wondered.

"Firstly." He began. "You being pregnant is the only reason I came on this climb." He said as he offered her a bit of dried fruit, which she took greedily. "I'm not going to let anything happen to you little sister. And especially not to my future nephew."

"Nephew?" She wondered curiously. "How do you know its a boy?"

He chuckled, happy to see that he'd distracted her from her worry, even if only temporarily.

"I don't." He replied with a smile. "Just hopeful. It's James's child so I'm already braced to be disappointed by it being short once it grows up. Might as well hope its a boy."

She slugged him on the shoulder and he donned a fake shocked expression.

"My child will never be a disappointment. Height aside." She said with a bit of genuine anger.

Alixan raised his hands in surrender. "Poor choice of words. You're right of course." Then he turned serious again. "But really Mina." He said. "I'll be right there with you the rest of the way. And you know what I can do. If anything happens, I'll get you- BOTH of you, out without harm."

"Can't guarantee that." She replied.

He shook his head. "No." He agreed. "No there's no guarantees in this kind of thing. But I can be fairly certain."

"Why'd you let me come up?" She asked.

"I told you." He reminded her. "You're a grown woman. I can't make decisions for you. Nobody can. Not even dad.... GENERAL." He said, reminding her of how she'd originally run away from home.

She thought back to when they'd all been children. She'd always thought that Artair or Xarina were the rascals of their family. But now that

Alixan had so glaringly pointed it out, SHE had always been the rebellious one. She just had a stronger call to duty, and less wanderlust, than their younger siblings.

"You've officially surpassed me as the favored child." Alixan said with a smile. "I may be the crown prince. But married AND expecting a child?" He made a fake impressed face. "Not even Ferria can claim that one." He pointed out into the darkness. "Neither she or I can guide you now little sister. It's all learning experiences for you from here on out. Just like any other new parent."

"Most pregnant woman probably don't need to LEARN not to do things like this." She said, partly scolding herself as she gestured at the massive spire behind them.

"No. This was a very foolish decision." He agreed. She was about to scold him for the insult. But he continued. "But you're probably one of the few that can actually pull it off." He looked over at her as a hand came over the ledge and grasped for purchase. "In the morning." He said as he moved over to help the only other remaining climber up.

"Hope I wasn't interrupting what sounded like a very important sibling conversation." The ragged looking elf said sarcastically. "Just been climbing for my life in the dark all night."

\----------

Samantha walked with her hands fidgeting with each other inside the front pocket of her hoodie.

It was nice to be able to walk the hospital grounds more or less freely now. She knew that the cameras were keeping tabs on her. And she wouldn't be surprised if the "Long Term Guest" badge that hung from one of her hoodie's draw strings wasn't being tracked somehow. She was a former M.P. so she knew exactly how that kind of thing worked.

She paused as she got to the door she'd been walking toward this whole time. She looked around a few times and was legitimately surprised to see that the halls were empty, though a few of the other doors were open, implying that their occupants were in them.

She was about to reach up to knock but stopped.

Was she really gonna do this?

She definitely wasn't in the right headspace to be making these kinds of decisions. And she didn't exactly have the freedom to run away and hide if something went wrong. There'd be no turning back if this didn't go as she hoped it would.

Shut up and just do it. The part of her brain that wasn't 100% hers said. It... wasn't big on patience.

"Oh hell. When it's right it's right." She said as she reached up again and knocked.

^("Come in!") The familiar voice said. She grasped the handle and pulled the door open.

"Hi." She said as she entered.

"Samantha." Fletcher said as he saw her. He had a small smile on his face as he turned from his computer to face her. "How are you? Come on in." He said with a gesture at the seats opposite of him. "Something I can help you with?"

"Uhhh." She said as her brain suddenly stopped existing. All the plans and imagined conversations she'd had to prepare for this point immediately evaporated as she grasped at brain cells that had stopped functioning. "Yes?" She said as she sat awkwardly in one of the seats.

How is it that YOU lead a pack? Her wolf instincts wondered. *So indecisive.*

"What can I do for you?" Fletcher asked.

"WOULDYOUGOWITHMEONMYOUTINGNEXTWEEK?!" She blurted out in a rush.

Fletcher, to his credit, had been in enough courts where things had gotten emotional or even occasionally violent, that his face only showed temporary surprise.

"What?" He asked. "Can... You repeat that?"

Samantha took a deep breath.

You should probably blink. Our eyes are probably freaking him out. Not good for gaining a mate.

SHUT UP! She yelled at her own brain.

"Would you..." She began. "Go with me..... on my outing.... next week?" She said slowly, forcing herself to keep the volume down. "My father... had to go back home so he could keep his shop open.... I have nobody... to go with."

"Um..." He said. He was blushing as he swallowed noisily. "Sure."

"Can it be a date?" She asked before she could second guess it.

Much better.

Quiet!

He swallowed again while glancing at his computer for just a moment, likely as a distraction. If he'd been blushing before, he was downright scarlet now.

"Uh... Yeah." He said with a nod. "That would be.... nice."

"Thank you." She said as she stood up and made to leave. "That's pretty much all my anxiety for the day. So I'll let you get back to work."

And right back to awful.

"I know a nice bistro." He said before she could get all the way out the door. She turned back, surprised at the outburst. He was still red. "They make an excellent filet mignon." Then he thought for a moment. "We'll have to get you some um.... formal wear though. They have a dress code. Shopping trip first?" He asked.

She smiled, though she made sure not to bare her teeth. "I'd like that." She said. "Kinda tired of the sweats."

"Then it's.... a date." He said with a hesitant smile.

She nodded and stepped out. When she did she let herself smile all the way. A passing staff member, likely another lawyer or something given where they were, went bug eyed at the sight and sped up her pace. But Samantha didn't care.

As she walked back to her room she kept smiling, even as she scolded her own instincts.

I went my whole life with insecurity and judgment from other women. She thought at the intrusive thoughts that she'd been wrestling with ever since her transformation. ***I don't need it from my own damn brain.***

Too bad. That other part said back. *Be a better fucking wolf. Literally.*

The legal/HR department receptionist smiled at her as she walked past. "Have a nice day Miss Jenkins." She said. Samantha nodded at her as she exited the door out to the elevator hall. Then once the door closed the receptionist pulled out her cell phone.

>SCORE! She did it. They're totally a thing. Cash in everyone.

She sent the message to the group chat.

Her phone began dinging rapidly only a few seconds later.

>Munro: I'm using my winnings to buy myself some new wedges. Might get some for Samantha too. Think Versace makes them that big?

Was the first response.

Fletcher's number was NOT in that group chat.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1381pcs/wait_is_this_just_gate_354/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (352/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1351igc/wait_is_this_just_gate_351/)

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"How long does the climb take?" He asked of Gorna, who was standing next to him and Steve awkwardly as they waited for the stable doors to open.

"One of the guards said that two to three days is normal." She replied. "Though she also said that when the prince leads them it tends to be faster. Apparently he drives them hard."

"So another day?" He wondered. "Maybe two."

"That's if she survives the leap." She replied.

"The what?" He asked.

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"Umm." She began. "You won't like it. I didn't. Especially since I couldn't go up there with her."

\---

KRAK!

Amina braced herself in case she needed to move as the steel weight fell away to the end of the rope's length, which was tied to her belt.

After a few moments of nothing emerging from the ledge above, she continued.

Krak!

She looked over at where the other noise had come from, just in time to see one of the other climbers freeze in place as they proceeded to stare

down a defending griffin. Once the griffin had backed up a bit, the climber began slowly moving away. Once they'd moved a sufficient distance the griffin retreated back into its den. Like before it kept its head poking out and watched the climber.

Krak-Krak! came from above.

She looked up at where her brother was. He was climbing more nimbly than any of them, having scaled the spire numerous times before he'd even successfully gotten his first personal griffin and many times since even then. He knew this climb better than most people knew their own country maps, and was moving rapidly.

She looked down for just a moment and was barely able to see the glowing lights of the keep below.

If everything had gone well, James would be back there by now. She wondered at what he'd seen in the Orccrag. No other human had been there before, and likely wouldn't again for some time.

She also hoped he hadn't said or done anything stupid that might get him imprisoned or killed. Then she heard another loud KRAK from somewhere, followed by a screech.

The sudden change from looking up, to looking down, to looking back up and to the side made her nauseous.

Or maybe the baby had. It was hard to tell.

Oh, who am I to judge James right now? She wondered. *At least he's doing his duty as a new prince. What am I doing? Getting myself a new mount? I mostly ride around on Steve anyways. What in the hells am I doing up here?*

She wanted to call up to Alixan and talk to him. To ask his advice.

But he was at least a hundred feet above her. And to call out now, in the middle of the griffin nests, would invite the wrath of all the griffins around them, and draw attention from above.

"Dammit." She said quietly to herself. "Too late for second guessing." She looked back down for a moment before reconsidering it as a new wave of nausea overcame her from it. "Gods. Isn't it too early to be suffering from babe's brain?"

She sighed as she pressed against the wall for a moment to stretch her arms a bit.

Whichever way she got back to the base of the tower, she'd need to talk to James. She knew he'd been uncomfortable when she'd told him what she and Alixan were going to do. But he'd obviously not wanted to hold her back. Neither of them knew what they were doing in this new marriage, or as parents. And while they weren't the first to ever be in that

particular realm of confusion, they needed to communicate a bit better moving forward.

KRAK! sounded somewhere off to the side where the other climber had clearly picked up their pace again.

"Oh hells." She said to herself. "You were never a quitter before. Let's not start now."

She set another piton in the stone face and in more ways than one, she reached out into the unknown darkness for another hand hold.

\----------

Vickers walked down the hallway, having just bathed and changed into his "duty" uniform. Which was basically a normal uniform with the sleeves cut off at the point where they'd normally roll up to, and the legs cut off just above his knee. He didn't wear a hat anymore, since they didn't fit. And his boots were a thing of the past.

It was a work in progress.

He rounded the corner and actually ran into one of the Petravian soldiers he'd been looking for.

"Guardian." He said with a nod. "Heading to the briefing room?"

"Chief." The massive elf said as she returned the nod. "I am."

He gestured and she began walking, he took up position next to her.

"I was hoping to get some intel on the agency hunt." He said.

"Then you're in luck." She replied. "That is what I am delivering to the King."

"News?" He wondered.

"Indeed. The Sergeant in question has been.... isolated... in a sense." She admitted, and he wondered if the royal army had OPSEC training for a moment. "And the other ones are being monitored."

"And that area I found?" He asked.

She held up an envelope with the seal of her office holding it shut.

"Got it." He said. "How bad?" He asked just as they got to the door to the King's audience chamber. The guards nodded at both of them, knocked and announced them, then opened the door.

"We have problems." She admitted as she stepped in ahead of him.

"Well fuck." He said, knowing that this briefing was about to bring a rain of shit down on his head.

And he couldn't even wear hats anymore.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1373blq/wait_is_this_just_gate_353/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (352/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1351gn8/wait_is_this_just_gate_351/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Krak!

She looked over at where the other noise had come from, just in time to see one of the other climbers freeze in place as they proceeded to stare down a defending griffin. Once the griffin had backed up a bit, the climber began slowly moving away. Once they'd moved a sufficient distance the griffin retreated back into its den. Like before it kept its head poking out and watched the climber.

Krak-Krak! came from above.

She looked up at where her brother was. He was climbing more nimbly than any of them, having scaled the spire numerous times before he'd even successfully gotten his first personal griffin and many times since even then. He knew this climb better than most people knew their own country maps, and was moving rapidly.

She looked down for just a moment and was barely able to see the glowing lights of the keep below.

If everything had gone well, James would be back there by now. She wondered at what he'd seen in the Orccrag. No other human had been there before, and likely wouldn't again for some time.

She also hoped he hadn't said or done anything stupid that might get him imprisoned or killed. Then she heard another loud KRAK from somewhere, followed by a screech.

The sudden change from looking up, to looking down, to looking back up and to the side made her nauseous.

Or maybe the baby had. It was hard to tell.

Oh, who am I to judge James right now? She wondered. *At least he's doing his duty as a new prince. What am I doing? Getting myself a new mount? I mostly ride around on Steve anyways. What in the hells am I doing up here?*

She wanted to call up to Alixan and talk to him. To ask his advice.

But he was at least a hundred feet above her. And to call out now, in the middle of the griffin nests, would invite the wrath of all the griffins around them, and draw attention from above.

"Dammit." She said quietly to herself. "Too late for second guessing." She looked back down for a moment before reconsidering it as a new wave of nausea overcame her from it. "Gods. Isn't it too early to be suffering from babe's brain?"

She sighed as she pressed against the wall for a moment to stretch her arms a bit.

Whichever way she got back to the base of the tower, she'd need to talk to James. She knew he'd been uncomfortable when she'd told him what she and Alixan were going to do. But he'd obviously not wanted to hold her

back. Neither of them knew what they were doing in this new marriage, or as parents. And while they weren't the first to ever be in that particular realm of confusion, they needed to communicate a bit better moving forward.

KRAK! sounded somewhere off to the side where the other climber had clearly picked up their pace again.

"Oh hells." She said to herself. "You were never a quitter before. Let's not start now."

She set another piton in the stone face and in more ways than one, she reached out into the unknown darkness for another hand hold.

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Vickers walked down the hallway, having just bathed and changed into his "duty" uniform. Which was basically a normal uniform with the sleeves cut off at the point where they'd normally roll up to, and the legs cut off just above his knee. He didn't wear a hat anymore, since they didn't fit. And his boots were a thing of the past.

It was a work in progress.

He rounded the corner and actually ran into one of the Petravian soldiers he'd been looking for.

"Guardian." He said with a nod. "Heading to the briefing room?"

"Chief." The massive elf said as she returned the nod. "I am."

He gestured and she began walking, he took up position next to her.

"I was hoping to get some intel on the agency hunt." He said.

"Then you're in luck." She replied. "That is what I am delivering to the King."

"News?" He wondered.

"Indeed. The Sergeant in question has been.... isolated... in a sense." She admitted, and he wondered if the royal army had OPSEC training for a moment. "And the other ones are being monitored."

"And that area I found?" He asked.

She held up an envelope with the seal of her office holding it shut.

"Got it." He said. "How bad?" He asked just as they got to the door to the King's audience chamber. The guards nodded at both of them, knocked and announced them, then opened the door.

"We have problems." She admitted as she stepped in ahead of him.

"Well fuck." He said, knowing that this briefing was about to bring a rain of shit down on his head.

And he couldn't even wear hats anymore.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/137385g/wait_is_this_just_gate_353/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (351/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12y0phn/wait_is_this_just_gate_350/)

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Amina followed suit, giving her line one last tighten before also setting back a bit and kicking out her right leg to work out a cramp there. The two other climbers rested in similar ways. The other two had fallen behind. The dwarf had decided he'd had enough and stopped at the worm trail, promising to head back down once he was rested. The other had been noncommittal either way, but had seemed broken by the climb.

"You mean the nearly two miles of climbing WEREN'T the hard part?" One of the others asked.

"Not at all." Alixan said with a grin that only Amina could hear in his voice.

He pointed at something in the sky and they all looked as something blurred past overhead. A moment later it banked in and they all watched a massive griffin with green fur on its rear half rushed into a hidden opening in the side of the spire.

"Now we're in the nesting region." He added. "You all have the slings we gave you. Right?"

Amina nodded as she watched him pull one out and begin feeding it out. When it was at full length he looked back at them.

"See that bit of fluff at the edge of that opening there?" He said, pointing with his other hand at the next ledge. "Looks like fur or something, maybe some desert silk?"

Amina nodded. "Aye." Said one of the other two.

"The fact that we can see that means that nest is unattended." He said. Then he pointed at a ledge slightly higher up and to the right. "See how that ledge is clean? No fluff or mess." Again they nodded. "Griffins keep a clean house. Especially when they have eggs or babes. It's how they avoid being spotted. A clean ledge means that a nest is probably occupied. But the slings let you find out."

He spun the weighted rope in a fashion that reminded Amina of James's preferred weapon.

"You still check the fluffy ones though." He said as he swung the sling up over him at the nearer ledge. It struck the rock face just below the ledge with a loud **KRACK!** He waited a moment. "See?" He asked as he wound up again. "No reaction. Now watch this." He swung again, and again the weighted end slammed into the rock face, this time right under the second ledge.

Something rushed out of the opening that they still couldn't see beyond the ledge. And in the blink of an eye a massive, red furred and brown feathered griffin was latched onto the side of the cliff. It screamed at them in an earsplitting screech similar to a hawks as its front claws raked at the air between it and them.

Instinctively Amina's off hand gripped the cliff as her sword hand gripped at her hilt. The sound of scrabbling rocks let her know that the others were reacting in similar fashions.

"Relax!" Alixan said with an open hand gesturing for them to stay still. His eyes locked on those of the griffin. "Relaaaaax...." He said in a voice that seemed directed at the beast rather than them. "We're fiiiiiine. He's just protecting his young." He still spoke in the soothing voice, even though the message was directed at them. "He won't go more than a few yards from it. We know he's here now. We can go around."

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They all followed his directions. After a few minutes, and a few yards of growing distance, the griffin eventually went back into its nest. Though it kept its head poking out and watching them with its keen bird eyes.

Once they'd all had a chance to catch their breaths and get their heartbeats under control Alixan leaned back again.

"So." He said as he pointed up at a point nearly two thirds of a mile higher. "See where the rock changes to that white color?" He asked.

The nodded again. Though Amina could see that one of the other two looked a lot paler now.

Alixan nodded along with them.

"That's the end of the nesting region." He said with that same grin from earlier. "Our goal is just past there. In the swarm." He said with a finger pointed straight up at the cloud of flying griffins. "Between here and there we have a dark mage's rune field of griffin nests. And we realistically CAN'T travel too closely together. We'll either have to split up, or proceed with massive gaps between each of us. Otherwise we'll piss off all the new parents." He winked at Amina as he said the last bit.

"Right." Said the climber who'd spoken up earlier. "That's the difficult bit."

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"If you hit your sling and the father- the males always tend the nests by the way. But if the father DOESN'T come out. And only pops his head out. Get as far away as possible."

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"How did you find my homeland Mr. Choi?" She asked as she ran a hand over Glag's head.

"With your help mostly." He joked with a smile he knew she couldn't see. She smiled behind her veil, though he couldn't see that through the miasma either. "But seriously..... it was a fascinating place." He said earnestly. "Not sure if the canyon full of deadly gas is really my aesthetic of choice. But... the fact that you and your people have not only survived there, but also thrived there. It's incredible. And

despite what must be a difficult way of life," He said as she nodded amiably. "Your people also seem incredibly friendly and generous. Wish I could have shared dinner and drinks with them."

"Maybe some day." She said hopefully. "And my people are like that for a simple reason."

James looked at her curiously, though all he saw through the purple miasma was her outline. She waved around her at that very miasma.

"As you've said. Life in the crag is difficult." She continued. "My people have a saying. 'If the air is already deadly, why add hostility?'"

James chuckled. "Guess that's fair." He said. "Still. I've enjoyed my time here. I hope I can come back and visit some day."

She nodded. "You and your family will always be welcome in my home." She said. Then she cocked her head a bit. "Though you'll need a few more of those suits. How is it holding up by the way?"

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"What is this?" She asked as she inspected it.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1362z2t/wait_is_this_just_gate_352/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (351/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12y0m2k/wait_is_this_just_gate_350/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (350/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12mfkc7/wait_is_this_just_gate_349/)

Writer's note: I know I've been gone. I'm fine. Medical issue is all but resolved. But Jury duty is back on for three more days. Be back friday if I have the mental energy left. Then ideally back to normal next week.

Until then, enjoy.

EDIT/PS: The Voice/Baly is voiced by Susan Sarandon. I have spoken.

\~

"You alright back there?" Alixan asked as he rotated in his harness so that he could look back and down at Amina and the three other people that had come along with them.

"I'm fine!" Amina yelled back as she set another piton into one of the numerous holes left by either previous climbers or by perching griffins. She struggled for a moment as the concealing cloak she was wearing got in her way, but after a smack from her hammer the piton set.

"Fine here." Said one of the other hikers, a Hisstian by the name of Gromek. The few others signaled the same. Though both Alixan and Amina doubted the status of the last two climbers, both of whom looked exhausted. One of them at least had the advantage of already having wings, so a fall wouldn't kill them unless something went wrong. The dwarf was another matter entirely.

"Hourly reminder." Alixan said as he turned back around and adjusted his cloak for a moment. "This is done at your own will and your own pace. You can turn around at any time. Or drop your marker and get retrieved by my men. You can also take breaks for as long as you want. No time limit. Your safety and survival are between you and the griffins." Then he placed his foot on the next foothold and began climbing again.

Amina shook her head for a moment and cleared it. Then she began climbing as well.

And she tried not to pay attention to the writhing mass of life that flew above them all in a murmuration larger than the entire capital city.

Somewhere up there was a griffin just for her.

"We're almost at the worm-trail." Alixan said. "Another few hundred feet and we'll take lunch there."

Amina redoubled her efforts.

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"Very few plants live here in the Crag." The Voice of Crag, Baly, said as she saw James's wide eyes through the front of his visor. "Only one of them is any good at building things. And even then, mostly as a fabric."

"Sooo.... ivory?" James asked as he looked at the palace.

"Is one of our most common building materials. Especially from before we'd made contact with the surface world and established trade." She replied as she pulled him back into motion again. "Which is when the palace was built."

"What.... makes a piece of ivory that big?" He asked, legitimate fear in his voice.

"Nothing." She answered easily. "It is not one piece but many. Fused via magical manipulation."

"So.... Bones?"

"Bones." She answered.

And in spite of the eeriness of that fact, James couldn't deny that the craftsmanship of the building was incredible.

The other buildings they'd passed on the way through the town, and it's vastly diminished miasma, had barely qualified to be called buildings. Most of them were more akin to tents that reinforced the Bedouin vibes that Baly's robes and facial coverings had reminded him of. And the few actual ESTABLISHED buildings had mostly been made of solidified clay or mud of some kind, further reinforcing the sense that he was in the old middle east somehow.

The palace on the other hand, was nothing like any of them.

It wasn't quite a pagoda. It wasn't tall enough for starters. Nor was it as massive as the sprawling estate of the Vatrian emperor or the Castle grounds of King Farrick. But the shape was similar enough to a pagoda that James couldn't dismiss the name in his mind. Also, rather than a massive spire or spike at its apex, it had a massive spiraling horn that appeared to be made of some kind of copper, and wound down to the side of the top most level.

She stopped them directly outside the gate to the (somewhat) modest compound.

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He had, so he nodded. "Was gonna ask Alixan about that." He admitted. "Wasn't a hundred percent sure on it. That's normal?"

"It is." She replied with nod. She looked at him as he looked out at the pond, which was finally settling down. "You're nervous. Will it be your first?"

He gulped inside the suit. Then nodded.

"You two love each other."

"Yeah." He replied.

"That wasn't a question." She shot back. "Anyone who sees you two interact knows it. And nervousness is normal for a first time parent.... Which makes her current choice of endeavor curious."

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"Take it from someone who speaks on behalf of her people." The Voice said. "Clear communication is key."

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They sat like that for a few silent minutes. James quietly scolded Glag as he ate several of the small black rocks. Then a gong sounded in the distance.

"That is the signal for evening meal." Baly said as she stood and held her hand out for him once more. "Come. Join me. My people have already marveled at your suit. Let's let them ACTUALLY meet you."

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Driscoll watched from a balcony as Vickers and Batista led the remaining P.O.W.s through morning P.T. The two of them were leading them through the last few stretches before they would leave for a run.

Behind them Five was rapidly climbing up and down different sections of the castle's outer wall, seemingly using the various crenelations and other markers as checkpoints as she rapidly scuttled up and down its side. He knew she was likely going to join them on the run. She... had a lot of energy now.

He looked down at his hands.

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He watched as the group turned to follow the former sergeant, though a few of them lingered behind a bit. Some of them watching Vickers' display of athleticism, some of them simply complaining about having to run.

Those are ACTUAL soldiers. He thought as he looked at them. *Even the complainers. Though they're probably actually air force, or maybe navy. What am I now?* He wondered as he looked down at his legs.

He thought about it for another few minutes. Until long after the PT group had gone through the side gate and began running out in the more rural part of the capital. He could still smell the sweat from the group lingering on the air.

"Fuck if I know." He said softly as he planted a hand on the railing in front of him and vaulted over it. He dropped the fifty or so feet and landed in a crouch that looked like something from a superhero movie. *Same as initial boot sequence.* He thought as he stood up and loped into an easy job that was likely faster than any of the POW's could sprint at. *One foot in front of the other until you've crossed the room. Rinse and repeat until calibrated.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1351igc/wait_is_this_just_gate_351/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (350/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12mfhxc/wait_is_this_just_gate_349/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I know I've been gone. I'm fine. Medical issue is all but resolved. But Jury duty is back on for three more days. Be back friday if I have the mental energy left. Then ideally back to normal next week.

Until then, enjoy.

EDIT/PS: The Voice/Baly is voiced by Susan Sarandon. I have spoken.

\~

"You alright back there?" Alixan asked as he rotated in his harness so that he could look back and down at Amina and the three other people that had come along with them.

"I'm fine!" Amina yelled back as she set another piton into one of the numerous holes left by either previous climbers or by perching griffins. She struggled for a moment as the concealing cloak she was wearing got in her way, but after a smack from her hammer the piton set.

"Fine here." Said one of the other hikers, a Hisstian by the name of Gromek. The few others signaled the same. Though both Alixan and Amina doubted the status of the last two climbers, both of whom looked exhausted. One of them at least had the advantage of already having wings, so a fall wouldn't kill them unless something went wrong. The dwarf was another matter entirely.

"Hourly reminder." Alixan said as he turned back around and adjusted his cloak for a moment. "This is done at your own will and your own pace. You can turn around at any time. Or drop your marker and get retrieved by my men. You can also take breaks for as long as you want. No time limit. Your safety and survival are between you and the griffins." Then he placed his foot on the next foothold and began climbing again.

Amina shook her head for a moment and cleared it. Then she began climbing as well.

And she tried not to pay attention to the writhing mass of life that flew above them all in a murmuration larger than the entire capital city.

Somewhere up there was a griffin just for her.

"We're almost at the worm-trail." Alixan said. "Another few hundred feet and we'll take lunch there."

Amina redoubled her efforts.

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"Very few plants live here in the Crag." The Voice of Crag, Baly, said as she saw James's wide eyes through the front of his visor. "Only one of them is any good at building things. And even then, mostly as a fabric."

"Sooo.... ivory?" James asked as he looked at the palace.

"Is one of our most common building materials. Especially from before we'd made contact with the surface world and established trade." She replied as she pulled him back into motion again. "Which is when the palace was built."

"What.... makes a piece of ivory that big?" He asked, legitimate fear in his voice.

"Nothing." She answered easily. "It is not one piece but many. Fused via magical manipulation."

"So.... Bones?"

"Bones." She answered.

And in spite of the eeriness of that fact, James couldn't deny that the craftsmanship of the building was incredible.

The other buildings they'd passed on the way through the town, and it's vastly diminished miasma, had barely qualified to be called buildings. Most of them were more akin to tents that reinforced the Bedouin vibes that Baly's robes and facial coverings had reminded him of. And the few actual ESTABLISHED buildings had mostly been made of solidified clay or mud of some kind, further reinforcing the sense that he was in the old middle east somehow.

The palace on the other hand, was nothing like any of them.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (349/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12l59s5/wait_is_this_just_gate_348/)

Writer's note: Driscoll may seem ignorant. But he's gone nearly two decades not knowing anything outside his suit. It's a strange new world for him.

Enjoy.

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As James and Baly, AKA the Voice of Crag, walked through the miasma at the bottom of the Crag he began to understand the reason walking hand in hand was so significant to the Orcs here.

He.... could not.... see.... anything.

The clear visor on his helmet/hood was all but useless. All he could see was the dark, constantly shifting, purple haze of the miasma. It was so dark that it was effectively black. He was reminded of footage he'd seen of some of the deep sea operations that guys like Vickers, and potentially the Muck Marchers, had undergone during the wars. Deep dives at night where visibility had been all but nonexistent.

And yet The Voice walked with pure confidence. Her stride never seemed to slow or stumble in the slightest, and the few times when he caught glimpses of the dark forms that he assumed were her guards, they seemed relaxed.

She also seemed to understand his needs. After roughly half an hour she paused and spoke.

"Do you need rest?" She asked, causing him to wonder if he had stumbled or gave some sign of exhaustion, though he was certain that he hadn't.

"I'm doing okay." He replied. "Feeling a touch claustrophobic. But that's not too surprising given my current situation."

"How is your suit working?"

James pulled his hand free of Glag's and pressed the readout on his wrist up against his visor.

>Filt. Stat. = 98.5%Air Circ.= goodRec./Exf. Time = 198.7HRS

There were a few other stats to read. But they were mostly things for a medic to check in case he got hit in a fight, and would only be important in this situation if any of them turned red.

"Everything is reading fine." He said. "Far as the suit is concerned I'm totally okay."

"Glad to hear." Baly said. "Shall we continue? It's only another mile or so."

"Let's get to it." James said as he held his hand out. Glag took it, though James wasn't sure how he could see.

Thirty minutes later and James felt the ground beneath his feet change. He also saw light, albeit faintly.

"We are here." Baly said as she slowed. She pulled James's hand and placed it on a rope. "Pull." She said.

James did, and felt that it was attached to an incredible amount of weight. But he kept pulling.

BONG!!!!

James practically leaped at the sound of the massive ringing noise.

"One more time." She said.

James followed the instructions not jumping, as much, this time when the massive gonging noise sounded.

The purple in front of his visor cleared a little bit as the light he'd seen earlier brightened significantly.

Suddenly James wasn't looking at an inky, swirling, so dark it was almost black, purple miasma. Instead he was looking at a street lined in houses that reminded him of pagodas only smaller. The miasma was still there, but it was reduced. It had been reduced from a zero visibility fog, to what was now closer to a light mist. He still couldn't see more than a hundred yards or so. But he could see.

And even in that small radius of visibility, James saw more Orcs, in more shapes, colorations, and sizes, than James had seen in his entire time at the capital.

"THE VOICE RETURNS!" One of Baly's guards announced loudly. "AND BRINGS THE FIRST UPWORLDER TO EVER VISIT UNDER THEIR OWN POWER AND WITH NO MAGIC!"

This caused all the people on the bustling street to pause and gawk.

Then they began to approach.

"Congratulations James." Baly said as she patted his hand and stepped forward to address her people. "You're a pioneer."

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Driscoll sat on the chair as Dr. Shaw went over all his vitals and muscular reflexes.

He didn't understand the purpose of it. Dr. Shaw WAS a doctor, sure, but his medical education was primarily focused on advanced prosthetics, and of course, cyberization. He wasn't exactly a physical therapist or anything. Hell, he even deferred to the other two Toolies when it came to surgical matters. he was closer to an engineer than to an actual medical practitioner.

Still. He'd made a point of giving both him and Five a once over every few days as they underwent the full cycle of their monthly transformation.

"Were we... just weapons?" Driscoll asked as the doctor checked the range of motion.

Dr. Shaw looked up, surprised at the unexpected question. Then went back to his inspection.

"Course you were." He said firmly as he moved up to Driscoll's knee.

Driscoll looked at him with mild shock.

"Have been since the second you let the first few doctors cut you up so you could fit into a suit. Hell before that even. When you signed you name on the dotted line saying you were willing to die for the chance to walk again. And willin' to kill to pay for it." Shaw finished.

"What's that make you?" Driscoll asked, mildly offended at how plainly the man had stated something that he'd only recently become insecure about.

"A gunsmith." Shaw said easily. "Or a tank mechanic. Or an old school sword and shield blacksmith. I just have a bit of medical knowledge to help."

"That's all?" Driscoll asked.

Shaw sat back and looked at Driscoll, who was now several feet taller than the doctor, rather than just a few inches.

"Son I didn't make the deep sea suits y'all wear." Shaw said with a sigh. "I didn't come up with the surgeries or the medical setup that put y'all in em or kept you alive with half your bodies missing. I didn't

sign on until the program had already been up and running for three years."

"Still. You kept us up and moving." Driscoll countered.

"What was I supposed to do?" Shaw shot back. "Government was paying me enough to keep my kids out of the slums and away from the shores. And you expect me to see a child in a mechanical suit, one barely older than my youngest more often than not, and NOT do what I can to help keep em alive? I may not have ever approved of the mission. But I myself wasn't the one pullin triggers. I was just fixing the ones that did."

The two of them sat in silence for a while as the doctor continued his checks.

"What am I now?" Driscoll asked. Causing the doctor to look at him again, though this time with less surprise.

"Hammer don't stop being a hammer just because it switches from nails to chisels. Gun don't stop being a gun just because it shoots deer instead of people." Shaw said.

"So you still just see me as a weapon?" Driscoll asked.

"I see you as the thing THEY made you all those years ago. Aint nothin' wrong with calling something what it is." Shaw answered. "The only difference is that now that you've undergone this transformation of yours, I don't see why you gotta answer to anyone. Don't see why you ever gotta pick up a gun ever again, save for choosin' to."

Driscoll lifted his leg up, showing off the magical anklet there.

"Still got one master." He said with just a bit of venom.

Shaw sat back and looked at the anklet for a moment. Then pressed the leg back down.

"I don't know this Vickers too well outside of how he had us caring for you." Shaw said, somewhat more softly now. "So I guess you'd be a better person to ask this question than me. But if you CHOSE not to fight. To just sit back and enjoy the new life. Would he FORCE a weapon into your hand? I think that's the difference. Choi sure wouldn't. Got the sense that that little guy was just fine letting you go whichever way you went."

Driscoll thought about that question. And for once, legitimately didn't know the answer.

"Everything's looking good Driscoll." Shaw said as he finished writing the last of his notes on the chart he'd been writing on during the checkup. "You can go relax."

Driscoll nodded and got up to put his robes back on.

Dr. Shaw made to leave, but stopped in the door.

"You know." He began as he looked back at Driscoll. "Of your squad, you're the last one to ask any of us that." He counted off on his fingers. "Doc was first. Few of the others asked a few years later. Rodriguez asked about two years ago." He shrugged. "Five asked back when we were saving her from the damage she got out in the desert. Though I doubt she remembers."

Then he walked out, closing the door behind him and leaving Driscoll to think of what that said of him.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12y0phn/wait_is_this_just_gate_350/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (349/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12l55uk/wait_is_this_just_gate_348/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Driscoll may seem ignorant. But he's gone nearly two decades not knowing anything outside his suit. It's a strange new world for him.

Enjoy.

\~

As James and Baly, AKA the Voice of Crag, walked through the miasma at the bottom of the Crag he began to understand the reason walking hand in hand was so significant to the Orcs here.

He.... could not.... see.... anything.

The clear visor on his helmet/hood was all but useless. All he could see was the dark, constantly shifting, purple haze of the miasma. It was so dark that it was effectively black. He was reminded of footage he'd seen of some of the deep sea operations that guys like Vickers, and potentially the Muck Marchers, had undergone during the wars. Deep dives at night where visibility had been all but nonexistent.

And yet The Voice walked with pure confidence. Her stride never seemed to slow or stumble in the slightest, and the few times when he caught glimpses of the dark forms that he assumed were her guards, they seemed relaxed.

She also seemed to understand his needs. After roughly half an hour she paused and spoke.

"Do you need rest?" She asked, causing him to wonder if he had stumbled or gave some sign of exhaustion, though he was certain that he hadn't.

"I'm doing okay." He replied. "Feeling a touch claustrophobic. But that's not too surprising given my current situation."

"How is your suit working?"

James pulled his hand free of Glag's and pressed the readout on his wrist up against his visor.

>Filt. Stat. = 98.5%
>
>Air Circ.= good
>
>Rec./Exf. Time = 198.7HRS

There were a few other stats to read. But they were mostly things for a medic to check in case he got hit in a fight, and would only be important in this situation if any of them turned red.

"Everything is reading fine." He said. "Far as the suit is concerned I'm totally okay."

"Glad to hear." Baly said. "Shall we continue? It's only another mile or so."

"Let's get to it." James said as he held his hand out. Glag took it, though James wasn't sure how he could see.

Thirty minutes later and James felt the ground beneath his feet change. He also saw light, albeit faintly.

"We are here." Baly said as she slowed. She pulled James's hand and placed it on a rope. "Pull." She said.

James did, and felt that it was attached to an incredible amount of weight. But he kept pulling.

BONG!!!!

James practically leaped at the sound of the massive ringing noise.

"One more time." She said.

James followed the instructions not jumping, as much, this time when the massive gonging noise sounded.

The purple in front of his visor cleared a little bit as the light he'd seen earlier brightened significantly.

Suddenly James wasn't looking at an inky, swirling, so dark it was almost black, purple miasma. Instead he was looking at a street lined in houses that reminded him of pagodas only smaller. The miasma was still there, but it was reduced. It had been reduced from a zero visibility fog, to what was now closer to a light mist. He still couldn't see more than a hundred yards or so. But he could see.

And even in that small radius of visibility, James saw more Orcs, in more shapes, colorations, and sizes, than James had seen in his entire time at the capital.

"THE VOICE RETURNS!" One of Baly's guards announced loudly. "AND BRINGS THE FIRST UPWORLDER TO EVER VISIT UNDER THEIR OWN POWER AND WITH NO MAGIC!"

This caused all the people on the bustling street to pause and gawk.

Then they began to approach.

"Congratulations James." Baly said as she patted his hand and stepped forward to address her people. "You're a pioneer."

\----------

Driscoll sat on the chair as Dr. Shaw went over all his vitals and muscular reflexes.

He didn't understand the purpose of it. Dr. Shaw WAS a doctor, sure, but his medical education was primarily focused on advanced prosthetics, and of course, cyberization. He wasn't exactly a physical therapist or anything. Hell, he even deferred to the other two Toolies when it came to surgical matters. he was closer to an engineer than to an actual medical practitioner.

Still. He'd made a point of giving both him and Five a once over every few days as they underwent the full cycle of their monthly transformation.

"Were we... just weapons?" Driscoll asked as the doctor checked the range of motion.

Dr. Shaw looked up, surprised at the unexpected question. Then went back to his inspection.

"Course you were." He said firmly as he moved up to Driscoll's knee.

Driscoll looked at him with mild shock.

"Have been since the second you let the first few doctors cut you up so you could fit into a suit. Hell before that even. When you signed you name on the dotted line saying you were willing to die for the chance to walk again. And willin' to kill to pay for it." Shaw finished.

"What's that make you?" Driscoll asked, mildly offended at how plainly the man had stated something that he'd only recently become insecure about.

"A gunsmith." Shaw said easily. "Or a tank mechanic. Or an old school sword and shield blacksmith. I just have a bit of medical knowledge to help."

"That's all?" Driscoll asked.

Shaw sat back and looked at Driscoll, who was now several feet taller than the doctor, rather than just a few inches.

"Son I didn't make the deep sea suits y'all wear." Shaw said with a sigh. "I didn't come up with the surgeries or the medical setup that put y'all in em or kept you alive with half your bodies missing. I didn't sign on until the program had already been up and running for three years."

"Still. You kept us up and moving." Driscoll countered.

"What was I supposed to do?" Shaw shot back. "Government was paying me enough to keep my kids out of the slums and away from the shores. And you expect me to see a child in a mechanical suit, one barely older than my youngest more often than not, and NOT do what I can to help keep em alive? I may not have ever approved of the mission. But I myself wasn't the one pullin triggers. I was just fixing the ones that did."

The two of them sat in silence for a while as the doctor continued his checks.

"What am I now?" Driscoll asked. Causing the doctor to look at him again, though this time with less surprise.

"Hammer don't stop being a hammer just because it switches from nails to chisels. Gun don't stop being a gun just because it shoots deer instead of people." Shaw said.

"So you still just see me as a weapon?" Driscoll asked.

"I see you as the thing THEY made you all those years ago. Aint nothin' wrong with calling something what it is." Shaw answered. "The only difference is that now that you've undergone this transformation of yours, I don't see why you gotta answer to anyone. Don't see why you ever gotta pick up a gun ever again, save for choosin' to."

Driscoll lifted his leg up, showing off the magical anklet there.

"Still got one master." He said with just a bit of venom.

Shaw sat back and looked at the anklet for a moment. Then pressed the leg back down.

"I don't know this Vickers too well outside of how he had us caring for you." Shaw said, somewhat more softly now. "So I guess you'd be a better person to ask this question than me. But if you CHOSE not to fight. To just sit back and enjoy the new life. Would he FORCE a weapon into your hand? I think that's the difference. Choi sure wouldn't. Got the sense that that little guy was just fine letting you go whichever way you went."

Driscoll thought about that question. And for once, legitimately didn't know the answer.

"Everything's looking good Driscoll." Shaw said as he finished writing the last of his notes on the chart he'd been writing on during the checkup. "You can go relax."

Driscoll nodded and got up to put his robes back on.

Dr. Shaw made to leave, but stopped in the door.

"You know." He began as he looked back at Driscoll. "Of your squad, you're the last one to ask any of us that." He counted off on his fingers. "Doc was first. Few of the others asked a few years later. Rodriguez asked about two years ago." He shrugged. "Five asked back when we were saving her from the damage she got out in the desert. Though I doubt she remembers."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12y0m2k/wait_is_this_just_gate_350/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (348/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12k3cwv/wait_is_this_just_gate_347/)

Writer's note: AAAaaaayyyy James only KIND OF put his foot in his mouth.

And hey look. Veliry is still being a boss ass little baddy. Nice.

Enjoy.

\~

"How are you doing?"

"Uhhh... So far so good." James replied as he peeked down at the small interface on his wrist. "Everything is reading okay."

"Not feeling dizzy or light headed?" The Voice asked.

"A little warmer than I like." James said with a chuckle. "But that's mostly just the suit and being nervous..... I hope."

"It's been nearly an hour. Shall we continue?" She asked.

James looked up at the platform some thirty or forty feet above them. He could see Gorna and Lady Melady, plus a few of Alixan's soldiers, standing at the edge and looking down at them. Though they were obscured by the pink mist between them and where James stood.

"Yeah." He said with only mildly uncertainty. "Might as well."

The Voice nodded and one of her guards tapped on the rope suspending the elevator. A moment later they began lowering again.

"Mind if I take a sample?" James asked after a few seconds.

"Of?" The Voice asked curiously.

James gestured around them. "The miasma." He answered. "Been kinda curious as to what it is and how it works. Maybe one of the people on Earth can figure it out."

"Go ahead." She replied. "My people believe that it is a gift from the gods. Meant to grant my people a safe place to live. Free from the outside world's influence if we so choose."

James gritted his teeth. The Voice must have heard it.

"You disapprove?" She asked.

James considered it for a moment. He didn't want to have a repeat of what had happened in Vatria. But he also didn't want to have to uphold a lie while he was down here. If he got this out of the way now and things went badly he could always have the elevator head back up and he could go back. But in a few hours that would stop being an option.

"I'm.... not a huge fan of the gods." He said simply.

"The prince has mentioned that you've.... literally... had run ins with them." She said. "And your arm confirms that to some extent."

"I have."

"And you dislike them?" She asked.

"For several reasons." He answered. "Is that an issue?"

"Not at all." She said, much to his surprise. "I am my people's spiritual leader. But not their religious leader. I mentioned wanting to find a way to have non-orc people capable of getting to the Crag without dying. If I really believed that the miasma was a gift from the gods then why would I do that?"

James thought of it. It was a good point.

"Who a person worships or doesn't is their choice and nobody else's." She continued. "Just don't let it cause any chaos in my homeland and there shouldn't be an issue."

"Glad to hear." He said. Then he turned a bit. "By the way. What's your ACTUAL name? In my head I've been thinking of you as THE VOICE... but that feels awkward."

The guards around her tensed, albeit only slightly. The Voice's eyes smiled again as she looked at him.

"You are an interesting one Mr. Choi." She said, her tone showing amusement. "It is Baly. Though I caution you to never let any of my people hear you call me that."

James winced a bit. "Did I just screw up something culturally?" He asked. "If so I'm sorry. I have a tendency to do that."

"A small one unique to my station." She admitted, still smiling. "But one that I have no issue with given that I highly doubt that you and the princess will make a habit of visiting. Besides, I've never understood that rule. And don't worry. You've done nothing worth stressing about." She looked at her nearest guard as she said this. The guard didn't say anything, but did make a point of turning to look away. James got the sense that that was her telling the two large orcs to simply ignore what had just happened.

The elevator touched down with a loud rumbling impact that made James wobble a bit.

"This is the first sub-level stop." Baly said as she held her hand out for him once more. "We have to transfer over to the next elevator. Come along Glag."

Glag looked at James, who nodded, and the two of them joined the Voice, Glag still holding onto his other hand.

James looked up as they walked the few yards to the next elevator. He couldn't even see the sky anymore, and had to guess that they'd dropped close to half a mile, if not more.

How deep is the Crag? He wondered as they stepped onto the next elevator platform.

\----------

"Ooookay." Veliry said as she finally managed to get where she'd been trying to go.

It had been a few days since she'd left Jadesport. Luckily the area outside the city where the bombs had dropped had been all but cleared by the army. Nothing had really survived the bombing. But there had still been dead burned trees for a few months after the battle. Now there was just miles and miles of open land, with the occasional stump or bit of newly grown scrub brush.

She'd had her enchanted carriage fit with wider, slightly textured, wagon wheels to help with the traversal of the area, especially since a lot of it was muddy now. But her horse had had no issues. She'd just had to take it slow.

She pulled the carriage up to one of the stumps left behind and used a hammer to sink a hooked spike into it. Then she pulled the horse out of it's harness and tied its bit to the spike.

"Be good Smepliesauce." She said as she patted the horse's muzzle and fished through one of her pockets for a salted piece of the fruit in question. The horse grunted happily as it munched on the salted fruit that was their namesake.

Then she began walking out and away from the horse and carriage and into the open land.

She walked for about an hour, judging that to be far enough that she wouldn't have to worry about the horse and carriage getting caught up in what she was about to do. She sat on a small rock outcropping for a moment and rubbed her feet. They hurt so much these days.

"Okay little one." She said while looking down at her belly with a pointed finger. She had noticed over the past week or so that that once flat stomach now had just a bit of roundness to it. "Do me a favor and just.... let me use my magic. Nobody is around and I'm not in danger. I just need to try something."

After another minute of resting her feet she stood up, grunting a bit as she did, and walked a few paces away from the rock she'd been resting on.

Then she began focusing. She'd been training for the past few weeks to try to get her powers back online. But the baby she was carrying had made it difficult beyond belief.

Still. She'd managed to get at least a few of her abilities to work with some level of reliability.

Like her flight.

The magical tattoos on her legs lit up with the light blue that they had been inked in as she began to slowly but surely rise up above the ground. She started slowly at first, making sure that the energy flow stayed nice and steady, but also making sure she didn't take too much from the baby either.

Once she got ten feet off the ground she sped up a bit until she got about fifty feet in the air. Then she focused on just hovering and keeping her eyes closed.

Now the hard part. She thought. *Stay quiet in there for me okay.*

She drew more energy into herself, and felt it begin coursing down her arms and settle in her hands. She focused it there and let it keep building, still focusing on keeping it flowing into her, and AROUND the unborn child, before getting to her hands.

When it had built up to a sufficient amount she initiated a spin. Nothing too fast. Roughly a full rotation every two seconds.

Then, as she angled her feet slightly back to preemptively counter the coming recoil, she brought her hands together and released the pent up magic there.

Once again, just like back in her lab, there was a loud whooshing noise, and she felt heat and wind blowing past her. This time she'd braced herself against the recoil of the spell as it pushed back against her. But she kept spinning too.

She kept the massive beam active for as long as she could, slowly lowering as she did until eventually she became exhausted and had to admit she was spent.

Her feet touched the ground ever so softly and she opened her eyes.

And was surrounded by some of the densest forest she'd ever seen in her life.

There were no animals. But she almost couldn't see the sky from how dense the trees and bushes and lichens were.

"Huh." She said in mild surprise. "Might've over done it a bit. But at least it worked."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12mfkc7/wait_is_this_just_gate_349/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (348/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12k3avg/wait_is_this_just_gate_347/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (347/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12i0bnf/wait_is_this_just_gate_346/)

Writer's Note: James is once again doing things that no human has ever done before. (At least not in the world he's in.)

Jenkins gets to see her dad. And Vickers spits some truth.

Enjoy.

\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~

James stood at the top of the lift platform with the Voice of Crag and Glag next to him.

The Voice was done with her visit to the Griffin's tooth and was due to be back at her home so she could resume her duties as... well... the Voice of Crag. James had mentioned in passing during the first nigh's feast, that he had some gear that might allow him to visit the Orccrag, though he'd also admitted that he wasn't completely certain it would work. The Voice had demanded that he make the attempt. She had been trying for years, with Alixan's help, to create a system that would allow outsiders to come into the Crag for trade and other visits.

Now he was standing on the platform looking down into the dark purple mist as the elevator rose up.

He was sweating in his gen six M.O.P.P. gear. He held the collapsible combination helmet and hood in his hands and already had the filter display strapped to his left wrist. He'd only opened the plastic seal on the suit about twenty minutes ago so everything was THEORETICALLY in perfect condition, and when he'd done a test seal and cycle the little display had read all green. So he had a little under two hundred hours of filter life before he had to get out of the crag.

But that tidbit he'd learned about all the animals the mist killed not rotting still had him on edge. He couldn't think of a lot of things that could kill and preserve that way. But he'd already said he would make the attempt.

The plan was simple. They'd get on the elevator, lower down to just below the mist table, then wait about an hour and see how he did. If he passed out or anything else negative happened they'd reverse immediately and get him to a healer. If nothing happened they'd continue down.

Luckily both the Voice and Alixan had assured him that as long as anyone exposed to the gas was recovered fast enough there would be no lasting effects. If anything, all the victims of the gas who had survived spoke of a rather pleasant sleep and feeling well rested.

James looked behind him to where lady Melady, and a reluctant Gorna, looked on in anticipation.

"Almost here." The voice said, sure enough when James looked down he saw the outline of the elevator platform.

He wished Amina was here.

But she and Alixan had decided to use the opportunity of James's potentially extended absence to undergo something they'd called "The Tooth's Bite".

To James the whole thing had reminded him of that old movie from before he was born about the blue people fighting the military. It hadn't been a good movie, so he couldn't remember the name of it. But it had had a scene that reminded him of what the two siblings had explained.

Long and short, Amina was going to climb the Griffin's tooth and get herself a new griffin. Preferably one that was larger and much deadlier than the ones the Royal Guard used as standard.

James just hoped she didn't die. Though he doubted she would.

Mostly he was just worried about the baby. He'd been tempted to bring it up. But the look of excitement in Amina's eyes had made him back down. Still, he'd resolved to have a word with her about it. He didn't want to keep her on a leash or anything like that. But he had noticed over the past few days that she was in fact beginning to undergo the physical changes that all pregnancies had. And it had just reminded him of how careful they needed to be.

The elevator rumbled up until it was even with the platform, breaking him from his thoughts.

Who am I to tell anyone to be safe? He thought with a sigh. *I'm walking into the damn crevasse of imminent doom wearing a MILITARY GRADE body condom. I'm stupid as shit.*

The Voice stepped onto the platform with her two guards and held out her hand.

James took a deep breath, placed the helmet/hood on his head, pulled the hood down, pressed the velcro at its edges down onto their mates, then rolled the material twice (just like training), causing it to tighten as it doubled over a few times, and pressed a different set of velcro down. A quick tap on the display attached to his wrist told it to begin filtering.

He took the Voice's hand and stepped up next to her. Glag stepped up next to him, and his hand grabbed onto James's. James looked down at the rock monster, who was looking up at him with what he thought was concern. James just smiled and nodded.

Then the elevator began lowering.

\----------

Samantha sat in the small meeting room tapping her feet. Her tail wagged, causing a soft thumping noise against the back of her chair as she worried at the edge of her hoodie with her hands.

After a few minutes the door opened and her father, wearing a hospital visitors badge, walked in with a small tray with cups of coffee and a bag of what her nose told her were doughnuts.

She shot up to her feet immediately and moved to hug him. But she froze as she saw him reflexively flinch back.

She'd forgotten, for just a second, what she looked like now.

The two of them stared at each other for what felt like hours, though they were just a few seconds. Then her father placed the food down on the small table to his left and moved toward her with his arms open.

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"Cause I was told to." She said, now getting almost as angry as Driscoll.

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to make sure I wasn't bein' set up." He looked at five. "How'd you know I didn't slip a live round in there?" He asked. "Or what would've happened if I had? What if it had been silver tipped?"

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"What? Like those bandits that made you so rich?" Driscoll shot back. They'd been given the declassified parts of Vickers' file before they'd ever come to this world. Including a break down of the stuff he'd done since coming here.

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Driscoll just stared at him angrily.

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"I know it's not." He said coolly. "At the end of the day they had given you your lives back. And they controlled you via the suits. I'm guessing that if you'd stepped out of line they would have had no problem ensuring that you couldn't do it again. Or stepping anywhere for that matter."

"Yeah." Five said even more softly.

"I've seen the way the Toolies care about you guys. Even if they try not to show it." The SEAL said. "And I get it. I do. Even if I haven't ever experienced that myself."

"Than why are you grilling us like this?" Driscoll asked.

"Because in order for either of you to move forward. We're going to have to break that indoctrination of yours." Vickers said while staring the still aggravated fox down. "You are just as dangerous now as you ever were in your suits. And just as durable too. Just in different ways. Plus you now have the ability to accidentally turn people into were-folk too if you're not careful. And trust me when I say that you do NOT want to get caught doing that." He set his coffee down. "Part of the condition of letting you two be converted was ensuring that I kept you in line, and made sure you understood the laws here. And part of THAT is ensuring that good ole Uncle Sam can't just say a key phrase and cause you guys to go all Benicio Del Toro on the castle." He said with a small laugh. "Orders are one thing. But blind obedience is another." He held up the purple control that linked with their ankle bracelets. "Believe

it or not. I want to be able to put this down without having to pick it back up again."

Driscoll didn't get the reference, though he did know who Del Toro was.

"I'm not even a wolf." Five said as she thought about what Vickers had said.

"Beside the point." Vickers replied as he stood up. "I've gotta go check in with Werner. She's been a lot peppy-er these past few weeks. Evening class is at fourteen hundred. Get some rest. Think it over."

Then he left them there to do just that.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12l59s5/wait_is_this_just_gate_348/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (347/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12i0892/wait_is_this_just_gate_346/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: James is once again doing things that no human has ever done before. (At least not in the world he's in.)

Jenkins gets to see her dad. And Vickers spits some truth.

Enjoy.

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James stood at the top of the lift platform with the Voice of Crag and Glag next to him.

The Voice was done with her visit to the Griffin's tooth and was due to be back at her home so she could resume her duties as... well... the Voice of Crag. James had mentioned in passing during the first nigh's feast, that he had some gear that might allow him to visit the Orccrag, though he'd also admitted that he wasn't completely certain it would work. The Voice had demanded that he make the attempt. She had been trying for years, with Alixan's help, to create a system that would allow outsiders to come into the Crag for trade and other visits.

Now he was standing on the platform looking down into the dark purple mist as the elevator rose up.

He was sweating in his gen six M.O.P.P. gear. He held the collapsible combination helmet and hood in his hands and already had the filter display strapped to his left wrist. He'd only opened the plastic seal on the suit about twenty minutes ago so everything was THEORETICALLY in perfect condition, and when he'd done a test seal and cycle the little

display had read all green. So he had a little under two hundred hours of filter life before he had to get out of the crag.

But that tidbit he'd learned about all the animals the mist killed not rotting still had him on edge. He couldn't think of a lot of things that could kill and preserve that way. But he'd already said he would make the attempt.

The plan was simple. They'd get on the elevator, lower down to just below the mist table, then wait about an hour and see how he did. If he passed out or anything else negative happened they'd reverse immediately and get him to a healer. If nothing happened they'd continue down.

Luckily both the Voice and Alixan had assured him that as long as anyone exposed to the gas was recovered fast enough there would be no lasting effects. If anything, all the victims of the gas who had survived spoke of a rather pleasant sleep and feeling well rested.

James looked behind him to where lady Melady, and a reluctant Gorna, looked on in anticipation.

"Almost here." The voice said, sure enough when James looked down he saw the outline of the elevator platform.

He wished Amina was here.

But she and Alixan had decided to use the opportunity of James's potentially extended absence to undergo something they'd called "The Tooth's Bite".

To James the whole thing had reminded him of that old movie from before he was born about the blue people fighting the military. It hadn't been a good movie, so he couldn't remember the name of it. But it had had a scene that reminded him of what the two siblings had explained.

Long and short, Amina was going to climb the Griffin's tooth and get herself a new griffin. Preferably one that was larger and much deadlier than the ones the Royal Guard used as standard.

James just hoped she didn't die. Though he doubted she would.

Mostly he was just worried about the baby. He'd been tempted to bring it up. But the look of excitement in Amina's eyes had made him back down. Still, he'd resolved to have a word with her about it. He didn't want to keep her on a leash or anything like that. But he had noticed over the past few days that she was in fact beginning to undergo the physical changes that all pregnancies had. And it had just reminded him of how careful they needed to be.

The elevator rumbled up until it was even with the platform, breaking him from his thoughts.

Who am I to tell anyone to be safe? He thought with a sigh. *I'm walking into the damn crevasse of imminent doom wearing a MILITARY GRADE body condom. I'm stupid as shit.*

The Voice stepped onto the platform with her two guards and held out her hand.

James took a deep breath, placed the helmet/hood on his head, pulled the hood down, pressed the velcro at its edges down onto their mates, then rolled the material twice (just like training), causing it to tighten as it doubled over a few times, and pressed a different set of velcro down. A quick tap on the display attached to his wrist told it to begin filtering.

He took the Voice's hand and stepped up next to her. Glag stepped up next to him, and his hand grabbed onto James's. James looked down at the rock monster, who was looking up at him with what he thought was concern. James just smiled and nodded.

Then the elevator began lowering.

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Samantha sat in the small meeting room tapping her feet. Her tail wagged, causing a soft thumping noise against the back of her chair as she worried at the edge of her hoodie with her hands.

After a few minutes the door opened and her father, wearing a hospital visitors badge, walked in with a small tray with cups of coffee and a bag of what her nose told her were doughnuts.

She shot up to her feet immediately and moved to hug him. But she froze as she saw him reflexively flinch back.

She'd forgotten, for just a second, what she looked like now.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12l55uk/wait_is_this_just_gate_348/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (346/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12fufwk/wait_is_this_just_gate_345/)

Writer's note: Like I said. The Voice of Crag isn't gonna be who or what James expects.

Also Vickers is officially in the "papa were/spec ops" roll now.

Also I made a bit of an
[*announcement*](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12gob9t/plans_plans_plans/) *this weekend if you missed it. So don't be surprised if I get a little inconsistent or if any previous chapters get edited or moved around. That said, everything about that is kinda TBD right now.*

In the meantime enjoy.

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"So tell me of your world young Hero." The Voice of Crag said as she sat side saddle on Steve's back behind James.

Amina had relegated to riding behind Alixan, despite Gorna's protests, and was watching the two of them very carefully. She didn't have too much to worry about though, the Voice wasn't exactly close to him, instead she sat several feet behind James and simply kept a hand on the back of his saddle to steady herself.

"Well." James began with a glance back. "It's honestly pretty similar to this one. At least at ground level anyways." He pointed at the rings that dominated the sky, and nodded toward the two moons that had just barely begun to peak over the horizon. "We don't have the rings. And only one moon. But if it wasn't for those it would be difficult to tell them apart without taking a really close look." He looked back and was surprised to see that she was actually writing what he said down in a small notebook. He wondered at that. But, it wasn't like he was telling secrets or anything. "And up until a few months ago we didn't have any magic either. Though, apparently that's changed."

"No magic?" She asked, her writing having paused. "How is that possible?"

James was tempted to tell her what they'd learned from "Not Roylan" last year. Or from Moon and Defiance. But then he remembered that the Voice of Crag was a spiritual leader for the Orcs and decided to keep that to himself. He didn't know what kind of impact that might have on another nation's religions. He'd already made that mistake in Vatria, and that had gotten a bit sketchy.

"Don't uh.... don't know." He said. Amina glanced over at him and he winked at her. She nodded ever so slightly. "That's a bit higher than my pay grade."

"Hmmm." She said as she began writing again. "And how did your people progress without it?" She asked after a moment. "I've heard tales of you and your fellow Earth Realmers having fantastic technology and weapons."

"Well. That's the key really." He answered. "We focused on technology. That was our path to survival."

"Interesting." She said in response. "And how do you find this world's level of technology?"

James thought of that for a moment. Nobody had asked him that before. And he had definitely not expected it from the spiritual leader of a nation of Orcs. But then again he had to remember that while there were lots of parallels between this world and Earth's idea of fantasy, they definitely had their differences.

"It's uh... it's difficult to compare really." He said. "On the one hand, you guys are functionally in what my world's historians would consider the medieval age. You... use swords, and shields, and bows and arrows. You ride on horses and other creatures. There are certain things that don't exist in this world... YET... And yet there are also certain things that ALREADY exist in this world when they didn't during my worlds equivalent time period."

"Like what?" She asked curiously as she scooted forward on Steve's back a bit.

James looked back uncomfortably.

"Well. I'm not sure what I CAN and CANNOT tell you." He started. "But Vatria just unveiled a flying ship. My people didn't get flight until well WELL after the medieval period. Though a few inventors had ideas. You guys don't have long distance communication outside of a few very difficult, and somewhat unreliable, spells. You still rely on riders and the post they carry."

She was back to scrabbling in her book again.

"You guys knowledge of healing is limited to your understanding of magic and basically just... magically reversing damage. Your bodies repel most diseases and sicknesses because of their magical nature. But I was the one that first introduced the mages and healers in the capital to the concept of bacteria and cellular structures."

"What are those?" She asked, a look of confusion in her eyes.

"Very small things that can't be seen with the naked eye." He said. "Which reminds me. I have some questions about how your people survive in the Crag."

"Oh?" She wondered.

James was about to mention his question about food spoilage when Alixan made an excited noise and kicked his griffin into a long, bounding leap through the air. In his distraction at the conversation, James hadn't noticed how close they'd gotten to the base of the Griffin's Tooth. Or that there was a rather ornate carriage rolling towards its front gate.

"Ah. Prince Alixan's betrothed." The Voice said with smiling eyes as she looked over and past James. "I do so hope that she brought some of her land's spiced fruits."

"Alixan has a betrothed?" James asked in confusion.

"I told you about that a while ago dear." Amina said as she eyed the way the Voice was now leaning over him. He himself was looking at her arm, which rested on his shoulder with surprising lightness for her size, in confusion.

Ahead of them Alixan opened the door to the carriage and held out his hand to the person inside. He was practically bowed over to talk to them, his massive frame standing almost six inches higher than the carriage itself.

A moment later a tall elvish woman, very nearly as tall as the prince himself, stepped out of the carriage. She wore the robes of a mage, but carried two long swords on each hip, four in total.

Alixan planted a kiss on her cheek, which she returned in kind, then he lead her over to them as James slid down Steve's side and offered a hand to the Voice.

"A welcome surprise everyone." The prince said. "My bride to be-" He motioned to James while looking at her for a moment. "Or as James's people would say, FIANCE, has arrived earlier than expected. James, Lady Gorna, friend Glag, this is Lady Melady of the order of the Dyeriss." He said as he gestured at each of them. "My lady this is Captain James Choi of Earth. I've told you a bit about him.

Despite her height, and the four swords on her waist, Lady Melady did a sort of curtsy type greeting that looked almost balletic.

"It is a pleasure to meet you all." She said in a voice that was higher than James had expected. "And good to see you great speaker." She said to the Voice. Then she turned to Amina. "And Princess. It has been too long."

Amina smiled and James knew just from seeing it that it was not an ACTUAL smile.

Aw crap. He thought as he watched his wife greet the newcomer.

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Vickers stood behind Five as she picked up and held his modified Colt-Tavor rifle in hands that moved well enough, but clearly weren't completely accustomed to handling a weapon.

Strapped to her face was a monocle made of red/green polarized glass that was easily recognizable as being part of the helmets that he'd handed Dr. Shaw. A set of cables ran down from the back of the securing strap to a pack on her belt. That powered it and also acted as a sort of antenna for the communications it was picking up.

"Alright. Sight in on the head of the dummy." He said as he looked over Shaw's shoulder at the tablet he was using to refine the programming of the device.

Five lifted the rifle up with only a little awkwardness. Vickers watched as the, almost video game style, aiming reticle on the field moved up and began to waver around on the dumy's torso and head.

"Hold it steady please." Shaw requested.

Vickers glanced back and forth between the tablet and the were-squirrel a few times. Then he walked over and grabbed the former muck marcher's arm with one hand, and the butt stock of the rifle with the other.

"It's too long." Five said with obvious annoyance in her voice. "These arms aren't as long as you and the boss's."

Vickers pressed the release button on the underside of the stock and pulled three of the extension sections out with audible snaps as the plastic popped off and then reformed. Then he pressed the plate of the stock back in, released the pressure on the button, and slapped it.

"I know." He said as he released his hold on the rifle. Which was now almost six inches shorter on its back end. "Try now."

Five pressed the rifle back into the meat of her shoulder again and he saw a bit of a grin as she pressed her cheek up against it.

"Much better." Shaw said happily.

"Oh that's not as awkward as I expected." She said with a bit of relief.

"Eh your aims a bit steadier." Vickers said. "But you'll also get your nose bloodied if you ride that far up."

"Huh?" She said in confusion.

"Open your left eye." Vickers said flatly. "Shoulda been open to start. But look at where the charging handle's gonna go and where your big ass squirrel nose is sitting."

Five did as she was told, then held the weapon out at arms length like it had turned into a venomous snake.

"Relax. That's part of why we're doing this." Vickers reassured her. "To figure out what you'll need to do to adapt to our gear."

"And how to adapt our gear to you." Shaw said with annoyance. Then he pointed out past them. "The dummy please."

"Oh. Sorry." Five said as she re-shouldered the rifle again. This time she kept her nose an inch or so further back and angled up a bit higher. Vickers figured that would keep her schnozz safe so long as she remembered to do that when it came down to fight time.

"Don't shoot!" Driscoll said as he jogged in front of them, weaving between the dummies in a weaving, back and forth, motion that reminded Vickers of old hockey training drills when he'd been a kid. When he got to the opposite end of the dummy field he jumped over the wooden fence there, barely even needing to leap to clear it with his long legs.

"STAY OFF THE RANGE!" Vickers yelled angrily.

"You're not even loaded!" Driscoll yelled as he vaulted over a set of crates near the Quartermaster's armory. There was a crashing noise from the other side. Then Vickers saw the red-fading-to-black tufts of his ears pop up. "That was already like that!" Driscoll said as he began running again, just in time to avoid the grasping arm of the massive orcish quartermaster himself as he burst out of the side of the building yelling at the retreating runner.

Vickers would have to remind him of proper range safety later.

Maybe by letting Five actually shoot at him. After all, it wasn't like any normal bullets would KILL the were-fox anymore.

Still. He was happy to see the lanky man moving much more gracefully, crash or not. The training was beginning to work.

"Uh... Doc Shaw. I think the focus is shifting." Five said, drawing Vickers' focus back to the current issue.

"No." Dr. Shaw replied. "That's your eye shifting. I kind of knew that your new physiology might do that. Quit trying to look straight. You're a damn squirrel now. Your eyes are made more for keeping you aware of your surroundings."

"Just let your eyes relax." Vickers said. "This aint a sniper rifle. It's an assault rifle with a little reflex on it. All you gotta do is look. If your eye doesn't line up right then we'll send a shopping list to the Colonel and try out new layouts until it works." Then he turned back to the doctor. "How's it reading the aim at least?"

"Tracking's fine." He said. Then he ran his stylus across one of the settings. "Hows that?" He asked.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12k3cwv/wait_is_this_just_gate_347/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (346/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12fuakj/wait_is_this_just_gate_345/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Like I said. The Voice of Crag isn't gonna be who or what James expects.

Also Vickers is officially in the "papa were/spec ops" roll now.

Also I made a bit of an [*announcement*](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12gob9t/plans_plans_plans/) *on* r/GATEhouse *this weekend. So don't be surprised if I get a little inconsistent or if any previous chapters get edited or moved around. That said, everything about that is kinda TBD right now.*

In the meantime enjoy.

\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~

"So tell me of your world young Hero." The Voice of Crag said as she sat side saddle on Steve's back behind James.

Amina had relegated to riding behind Alixan, despite Gorna's protests, and was watching the two of them very carefully. She didn't have too much to worry about though, the Voice wasn't exactly close to him, instead she sat several feet behind James and simply kept a hand on the back of his saddle to steady herself.

"Well." James began with a glance back. "It's honestly pretty similar to this one. At least at ground level anyways." He pointed at the rings that dominated the sky, and nodded toward the two moons that had just barely begun to peak over the horizon. "We don't have the rings. And only one moon. But if it wasn't for those it would be difficult to tell them apart without taking a really close look." He looked back and was surprised to see that she was actually writing what he said down in a small notebook. He wondered at that. But, it wasn't like he was telling secrets or

anything. "And up until a few months ago we didn't have any magic either. Though, apparently that's changed."

"No magic?" She asked, her writing having paused. "How is that possible?"

James was tempted to tell her what they'd learned from "Not Roylan" last year. Or from Moon and Defiance. But then he remembered that the Voice of Crag was a spiritual leader for the Orcs and decided to keep that to himself. He didn't know what kind of impact that might have on another nation's religions. He'd already made that mistake in Vatria, and that had gotten a bit sketchy.

"Don't uh.... don't know." He said. Amina glanced over at him and he winked at her. She nodded ever so slightly. "That's a bit higher than my pay grade."

"Hmmm." She said as she began writing again. "And how did your people progress without it?" She asked after a moment. "I've heard tales of you and your fellow Earth Realmers having fantastic technology and weapons."

"Well. That's the key really." He answered. "We focused on technology. That was our path to survival."

"Interesting." She said in response. "And how do you find this world's level of technology?"

James thought of that for a moment. Nobody had asked him that before. And he had definitely not expected it from the spiritual leader of a nation of Orcs. But then again he had to remember that while there were lots of parallels between this world and Earth's idea of fantasy, they definitely had their differences.

"It's uh... it's difficult to compare really." He said. "On the one hand, you guys are functionally in what my world's historians would consider the medieval age. You... use swords, and shields, and bows and arrows. You ride on horses and other creatures. There are certain things that don't exist in this world... YET... And yet there are also certain things that ALREADY exist in this world when they didn't during my worlds equivalent time period."

"Like what?" She asked curiously as she scooted forward on Steve's back a bit.

James looked back uncomfortably.

"Well. I'm not sure what I CAN and CANNOT tell you." He started. "But Vatria just unveiled a flying ship. My people didn't get flight until well WELL after the medieval period. Though a few inventors had ideas. You guys don't have long distance communication outside of a few very difficult, and somewhat unreliable, spells. You still rely on riders and the post they carry."

She was back to scrabbling in her book again.

"You guys knowledge of healing is limited to your understanding of magic and basically just... magically reversing damage. Your bodies repel most diseases and sicknesses because of their magical nature. But I was the one that first introduced the mages and healers in the capital to the concept of bacteria and cellular structures."

"What are those?" She asked, a look of confusion in her eyes.

"Very small things that can't be seen with the naked eye." He said. "Which reminds me. I have some questions about how your people survive in the Crag."

"Oh?" She wondered.

James was about to mention his question about food spoilage when Alixan made an excited noise and kicked his griffin into a long, bounding leap through the air. In his distraction at the conversation, James hadn't noticed how close they'd gotten to the base of the Griffin's Tooth. Or that there was a rather ornate carriage rolling towards its front gate.

"Ah. Prince Alixan's betrothed." The Voice said with smiling eyes as she looked over and past James. "I do so hope that she brought some of her land's spiced fruits."

"Alixan has a betrothed?" James asked in confusion.

"I told you about that a while ago dear." Amina said as she eyed the way the Voice was now leaning over him. He himself was looking at her arm, which rested on his shoulder with surprising lightness for her size, in confusion.

Ahead of them Alixan opened the door to the carriage and held out his hand to the person inside. He was practically bowed over to talk to them, his massive frame standing almost six inches higher than the carriage itself.

A moment later a tall elvish woman, very nearly as tall as the prince himself, stepped out of the carriage. She wore the robes of a mage, but carried two long swords on each hip, four in total.

Alixan planted a kiss on her cheek, which she returned in kind, then he lead her over to them as James slid down Steve's side and offered a hand to the Voice.

"A welcome surprise everyone." The prince said. "My bride to be-" He motioned to James while looking at her for a moment. "Or as James's people would say, FIANCE, has arrived earlier than expected. James, Lady Gorna, friend Glag, this is Lady Melady of the order of the Dyeriss." He said as he gestured at each of them. "My lady this is Captain James Choi of Earth. I've told you a bit about him.

Despite her height, and the four swords on her waist, Lady Melady did a sort of curtsy type greeting that looked almost balletic.

"It is a pleasure to meet you all." She said in a voice that was higher than James had expected. "And good to see you great speaker." She said to the Voice. Then she turned to Amina. "And Princess. It has been too long."

Amina smiled and James knew just from seeing it that it was not an ACTUAL smile.

Aw crap. He thought as he watched his wife greet the newcomer.

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Vickers stood behind Five as she picked up and held his modified Colt-Tavor rifle in hands that moved well enough, but clearly weren't completely accustomed to handling a weapon.

Strapped to her face was a monocle made of red/green polarized glass that was easily recognizable as being part of the helmets that he'd handed Dr. Shaw. A set of cables ran down from the back of the securing strap to a pack on her belt. That powered it and also acted as a sort of antenna for the communications it was picking up.

"Alright. Sight in on the head of the dummy." He said as he looked over Shaw's shoulder at the tablet he was using to refine the programming of the device.

Five lifted the rifle up with only a little awkwardness. Vickers watched as the, almost video game style, aiming reticle on the field moved up and began to waver around on the dumy's torso and head.

"Hold it steady please." Shaw requested.

Vickers glanced back and forth between the tablet and the were-squirrel a few times. Then he walked over and grabbed the former muck marcher's arm with one hand, and the butt stock of the rifle with the other.

"It's too long." Five said with obvious annoyance in her voice. "These arms aren't as long as you and the boss's."

Vickers pressed the release button on the underside of the stock and pulled three of the extension sections out with audible snaps as the plastic popped off and then reformed. Then he pressed the plate of the stock back in, released the pressure on the button, and slapped it.

"I know." He said as he released his hold on the rifle. Which was now almost six inches shorter on its back end. "Try now."

Five pressed the rifle back into the meat of her shoulder again and he saw a bit of a grin as she pressed her cheek up against it.

"Much better." Shaw said happily.

"Oh that's not as awkward as I expected." She said with a bit of relief.

"Eh your aims a bit steadier." Vickers said. "But you'll also get your nose bloodied if you ride that far up."

"Huh?" She said in confusion.

"Open your left eye." Vickers said flatly. "Shoulda been open to start. But look at where the charging handle's gonna go and where your big ass squirrel nose is sitting."

Five did as she was told, then held the weapon out at arms length like it had turned into a venomous snake.

"Relax. That's part of why we're doing this." Vickers reassured her. "To figure out what you'll need to do to adapt to our gear."

"And how to adapt our gear to you." Shaw said with annoyance. Then he pointed out past them. "The dummy please."

"Oh. Sorry." Five said as she re-shouldered the rifle again. This time she kept her nose an inch or so further back and angled up a bit higher. Vickers figured that would keep her schnozz safe so long as she remembered to do that when it came down to fight time.

"Don't shoot!" Driscoll said as he jogged in front of them, weaving between the dummies in a weaving, back and forth, motion that reminded Vickers of old hockey training drills when he'd been a kid. When he got to the opposite end of the dummy field he jumped over the wooden fence there, barely even needing to leap to clear it with his long legs.

"STAY OFF THE RANGE!" Vickers yelled angrily.

^("You're not even loaded!") Driscoll yelled as he vaulted over a set of crates near the Quartermaster's armory. There was a crashing noise from the other side. Then Vickers saw the red-fading-to-black tufts of his ears pop up. "^(That was already like that!") Driscoll said as he began running again, just in time to avoid the grasping arm of the massive orcish quartermaster himself as he burst out of the side of the building yelling at the retreating runner.

Vickers would have to remind him of proper range safety later.

Maybe by letting Five actually shoot at him. After all, it wasn't like any normal bullets would KILL the were-fox anymore.

Still. He was happy to see the lanky man moving much more gracefully, crash or not. The training was beginning to work.

"Uh... Doc Shaw. I think the focus is shifting." Five said, drawing Vickers' focus back to the current issue.

"No." Dr. Shaw replied. "That's your eye shifting. I kind of knew that your new physiology might do that. Quit trying to look straight. You're a damn squirrel now. Your eyes are made more for keeping you aware of your surroundings."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (345/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12e0qaj/wait_is_this_just_gate_344/)

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"So this is the summoned hero and new prince?" The tall, almost fully covered, orc woman said as she stepped off of the lift and approached.

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"So it is, Great Speaker." He said with a small bow. "And his new wife, my younger sister Amina. And their traveling companions." He added as he gestured to Gorna and Glag. It is good to see you again."

She bowed her head to Alixan in return. "It has been far too long since I have gazed upon the sky clearly." She said. Then her eyes moved in a way that made it obvious that she was smiling. "Or upon the face of a friend."

Then she turned to regard James and the others again.

"I welcome you to my home." She said with a slight tilt of her head. "Or at least as close to it as you can safely come." She turned back to the prince. "I take it there's to be a feast?"

Alixan smiled widely. "We've also got some Cedonian Gold in one of our cold rooms for you."

Once again the massive orc's eyes implied a smile had formed on her face.

"You know me too well." She said. Then she held her hand out to James.

James looked at Amina, who was staring at the offered hand in confusion. Then he looked at Alixan.

"It is customary for the Voice of Crag to walk in hand with whoever the highest ranking person in the area is." He said. Then he raised an eyebrow in question. "Which I was fairly certain was me."

"Hero summoned by gods outranks crown prince." She replied coolly.

James gritted his teeth at that, remembering how Alixan had said she was her people's spiritual leader.

But he had learned his lesson from Vatria, and he took the offered hand.

He had a feeling that it was going to be a long night.

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"So ummmm... How did everyone... like the trip?" Samantha asked as she stood up in front of all the werewolves. She... wasn't terribly fond of public speaking. "Have a good time?"

There was a bit of a murmur as everyone talked to the people around them a bit, some nodded heads, as usual a handful in the back of the room looked more annoyed than anything. Same as every group meeting. She could hear a handful of mentions of squirrels.

"I'm glad to hear that it went well. I know I enjoyed getting to stretch my legs a bit." She looked down at the note-card with the details that had been given to her by Dr. Munro. "We've got some really good news." She said with a smile. "Starting next week we will be allowed to have

monitored visits from our friends and loved ones. Um... People with spouses will even be given time in a secure cottage for um.... Well you know." She said with a slight grin.

There was a hissing noise from one of the wolves to her left that had two of his fingers in his mouth. He looked confused for a moment before trying again, with the same result.

"Damn. I guess we can't whistle anymore." He said with a look of mild disappointment. This drew short lived laughter from most of them. Luckily the one who'd attempted to whistle was part of the laughing.

"Anyways. You guys can discuss that when you have the family meetings next week. Um... there will be some limitations and precautions necessary if you do opt for that. Just... safety and health stuff mainly." She said. The laughter had helped her relax a little bit. "Um the big one though." She began, causing everyone to focus a bit more. "Is that... starting this next month the doctors are going to be going over everyone's notes and running us all through a series of group assessments. Mainly interviews with the doctors as a group."

This caused even the wolves at the back to sit forward with curiosity.

"And if the doctors determine that you have um... adjusted... well enough. They'll be letting us out into the surrounding community here at Sturgis on a TRIAL basis. We'll be monitored, and escorted. Both for the safety of the community AND-" She said with a raised finger as she saw some of them getting ready to speak up. "For OUR safety. They've assured me that we'll be allowed to go anywhere we want. And do.... almost anything we want. Within reason. They just don't want any of us having anything go wrong. No repeats of what happened when we became this way."

There were mumbles and questions and more than a few happy faces. But there were also some LESS than happy faces.

"What's next?" One of the back row wolves asked. "Leashes? We've been here over six months now."

"Yeah. And what are the criteria for these panels of judges? Cause that's what it sounds like." Another one asked.

Samantha held her hands up in a warding gesture as the questions began to ramp up. She... hadn't been prepared for any of this.

Luckily Dr. Munro stepped in.

"Everyone please." She said loudly as she stepped up next to Samantha. "Please. Settle down."

It still took a few moments before the roar settled down to a gentle murmur.

"We're not your captors." She said. "We're not your wardens. This isn't a prison."

"Sure seems like it some times." The first of the back wolves said.

"I know." She said. "I know. But at the end of the day we are a HOSPITAL." She gestured at the few other doctors in the room. "Our priority is the health and safety of the community around us. And our number one priority is the health and safety of our patients. And that's YOU." She said with a gesture at the wolves.

She waited a few moments to let everyone sit on that.

"We are in uncharted territory with you guys." She continued. "We want nothing more than to let you all go back to your normal lives. To the extent that you can now. But we had to fight hard to keep the military from keeping you as ACTUAL prisoners. The only reason they didn't is because of how public the wolf outbreak was, and the fact that that pack of wild ones managed to get away and split up."

"Shoulda gone with them." Someone whispered.

"Do you really believe that mister Schmidt?" She asked testily. "Cause from what I was told of your case, one of your biggest reasons for letting the hospital take you in was because you didn't want to kill anyone. And that's what THEY were doing. What they're still doing according to the news."

Schmidt grumbled, but remained quiet.

"You're all here because you couldn't, or wouldn't, let yourselves do that for one reason or another." The doctor said. "We're here to help convince the government that if you go out into the public, that will remain the case. That's all we're trying to do. That and help you adjust to your new lives."

Fletcher, one of the few non-wolves in the room who also wasn't a doctor, spoke up.

"That said, any of you that desires to be discharged may do so." He said. "But you would be doing so at your own risk. And I guarantee that the government would be watching you like a hawk for any slip ups. And by now you've all seen how they handled the other wolves. Wouldn't expect much less if I were you."

"They're gonna do that anyways." Someone closer to the front said. They didn't sound as angry as the back row, mostly just concerned.

"Probably." Samantha said. "I would. And I was one of them before this happened." She shrugged. "We're dangerous now. Whether we like it or not. And, as we all saw out at the lake, we AREN'T in complete control of our brains anymore. And if that...." She took a deep breath. "Goddess.... decides to mess with us. We might not even be able to do anything about it. I mean. I told the other guy to fuck off and he STILL made me into the....." She looked over to Dr. Munro. "What did they end up calling me?" She asked uncomfortably.

"Wonder Wolf." The doctor said.

Samantha groaned. "That's terrible." She said to herself, her eyes unfocused as they stared at the podium. Then she took a deep breath and looked back out. "Look. We have to acknowledge that there's merit to not just.... LETTING us run around without making sure we've got a handle on this. And the first steps is trial runs."

There was grumbling. But most of them had to admit the logic in it.

"What about me?" Said their youngest member, a young boy of only eight years old named Tommy who, thanks to the wolf outbreak, was an orphan now. His downcast eyes and trembling voice made everyone stop talking and reconsider. "I don't... have anywhere to go."

Suddenly everyone else's complaints seemed stupid.

Mrs. Ramirez, a fifty two year old florist who had been turned into a wolf while watering her shop's plants for the night, wrapped her arm around the boy. She'd become a sort of adoptive mother to Tommy since that night.

"You can come with me mijo." She said with a gentle hug.

Samantha moved past the podium and knelt down in front of the two of them. She lifted the young wolf's head up a bit with her chin.

"And maybe we can go back to the lake every now and then." She said with a smile. "I saw how much you liked swimming in it." She looked off to the side and Dr. Munro nodded with a smile. "Wanna do that?"

Tommy nodded.

"That's another thing." She said as she stood back up and moved back to the podium. "I know its... awkward.... And probably cliche since we're wolves now. But we should probably stick close to each other. Look out for each other. Just in case anything goes wrong even while we're out and about."

The back wolves began grumbling again, but she beat them to the chase.

"I'm not saying we have to be friends. And for god's sake I'm not gonna call us a pack." She reassured them. "We're not gonna be that cliche.... But I do think we should at least stay as.... well... this." She said, gesturing at the lot of them. "A support group. After all, we're the only ones who know what we're going through. Even once we're out of here." She looked at Fletcher, and tried not to stare. But she needed the lawyer to know she was talking to the hospital. "And we WILL all get out of her eventually. We should stay in touch. Exchange info and maybe do a monthly meeting, even if only online." She shrugged. "Plus it'll let us keep tabs on each other in case something happens to any of us. By the Government or by just.... people being assholes."

Despite not being fans of the whole situation, even the wolves in the back row could admit that that was probably a good idea.

As the meeting slowly relaxed and opened up to people talking about how they were doing, Dr. Munro stood off to the side suppressing a smile.

She was glad to see that she'd been right about Samantha and her role in the werewolf group.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (345/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12e0n05/wait_is_this_just_gate_344/) /
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James gritted his teeth at that, remembering how Alixan had said she was her people's spiritual leader.

But he had learned his lesson from Vatria, and he took the offered hand.

He had a feeling that it was going to be a long night.

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"So ummmm... How did everyone... like the trip?" Samantha asked as she stood up in front of all the werewolves. She... wasn't terribly fond of public speaking. "Have a good time?"

There was a bit of a murmur as everyone talked to the people around them a bit, some nodded heads, as usual a handful in the back of the room looked more annoyed than anything. Same as every group meeting. She could hear a handful of mentions of squirrels.

"I'm glad to hear that it went well. I know I enjoyed getting to stretch my legs a bit." She looked down at the note-card with the details that had been given to her by Dr. Munro. "We've got some really good news." She said with a smile. "Starting next week we will be allowed to have monitored visits from our friends and loved ones. Um... People with spouses will even be given time in a secure cottage for um.... Well you know." She said with a slight grin.

There was a hissing noise from one of the wolves to her left that had two of his fingers in his mouth. He looked confused for a moment before trying again, with the same result.

"Damn. I guess we can't whistle anymore." He said with a look of mild disappointment. This drew short lived laughter from most of them. Luckily the one who'd attempted to whistle was part of the laughing.

"Anyways. You guys can discuss that when you have the family meetings next week. Um... there will be some limitations and precautions necessary if you do opt for that. Just... safety and health stuff mainly." She said. The laughter had helped her relax a little bit. "Um the big one though." She began, causing everyone to focus a bit more. "Is that... starting this next month the doctors are going to be going over everyone's notes and running us all through a series of group assessments. Mainly interviews with the doctors as a group."

This caused even the wolves at the back to sit forward with curiosity.

"And if the doctors determine that you have um... adjusted... well enough. They'll be letting us out into the surrounding community here at Sturgis on a TRIAL basis. We'll be monitored, and escorted. Both for the safety of the community AND-" She said with a raised finger as she saw some of them getting ready to speak up. "For OUR safety. They've assured me that we'll be allowed to go anywhere we want. And do.... almost anything we want. Within reason. They just don't want any of us having anything go wrong. No repeats of what happened when we became this way."

There were mumbles and questions and more than a few happy faces. But there were also some LESS than happy faces.

"What's next?" One of the back row wolves asked. "Leashes? We've been here over six months now."

"Yeah. And what are the criteria for these panels of judges? Cause that's what it sounds like." Another one asked.

Samantha held her hands up in a warding gesture as the questions began to ramp up. She... hadn't been prepared for any of this.

Luckily Dr. Munro stepped in.

"Everyone please." She said loudly as she stepped up next to Samantha. "Please. Settle down."

It still took a few moments before the roar settled down to a gentle murmur.

"We're not your captors." She said. "We're not your wardens. This isn't a prison."

"Sure seems like it some times." The first of the back wolves said.

"I know." She said. "I know. But at the end of the day we are a HOSPITAL." She gestured at the few other doctors in the room. "Our priority is the health and safety of the community around us. And our number one priority is the health and safety of our patients. And that's YOU." She said with a gesture at the wolves.

She waited a few moments to let everyone sit on that.

"We are in uncharted territory with you guys." She continued. "We want nothing more than to let you all go back to your normal lives. To the extent that you can now. But we had to fight hard to keep the military from keeping you as ACTUAL prisoners. The only reason they didn't is because of how public the wolf outbreak was, and the fact that that pack of wild ones managed to get away and split up."

^("Shoulda gone with them.") Someone whispered.

"Do you really believe that mister Schmidt?" She asked testily. "Cause from what I was told of your case, one of your biggest reasons for letting the hospital take you in was because you didn't want to kill

anyone. And that's what THEY were doing. What they're still doing according to the news."

Schmidt grumbled, but remained quiet.

"You're all here because you couldn't, or wouldn't, let yourselves do that for one reason or another." The doctor said. "We're here to help convince the government that if you go out into the public, that will remain the case. That's all we're trying to do. That and help you adjust to your new lives."

Fletcher, one of the few non-wolves in the room who also wasn't a doctor, spoke up.

"That said, any of you that desires to be discharged may do so." He said. "But you would be doing so at your own risk. And I guarantee that the government would be watching you like a hawk for any slip ups. And by now you've all seen how they handled the other wolves. Wouldn't expect much less if I were you."

"They're gonna do that anyways." Someone closer to the front said. They didn't sound as angry as the back row, mostly just concerned.

"Probably." Samantha said. "I would. And I was one of them before this happened." She shrugged. "We're dangerous now. Whether we like it or not. And, as we all saw out at the lake, we AREN'T in complete control of our brains anymore. And if that...." She took a deep breath. "Goddess.... decides to mess with us. We might not even be able to do anything about it. I mean. I told the other guy to fuck off and he STILL made me into the....." She looked over to Dr. Munro. "What did they end up calling me?" She asked uncomfortably.

"Wonder Wolf." The doctor said.

Samantha groaned. "That's terrible." She said to herself, her eyes unfocused as they stared at the podium. Then she took a deep breath and looked back out. "Look. We have to acknowledge that there's merit to not just.... LETTING us run around without making sure we've got a handle on this. And the first steps is trial runs."

There was grumbling. But most of them had to admit the logic in it.

"What about me?" Said their youngest member, a young boy of only eight years old named Tommy who, thanks to the wolf outbreak, was an orphan now. His downcast eyes and trembling voice made everyone stop talking and reconsider. "I don't... have anywhere to go."

Suddenly everyone else's complaints seemed stupid.

Mrs. Ramirez, a fifty two year old florist who had been turned into a wolf while watering her shop's plants for the night, wrapped her arm around the boy. She'd become a sort of adoptive mother to Tommy since that night.

"You can come with me mijo." She said with a gentle hug.

Samantha moved past the podium and knelt down in front of the two of them. She lifted the young wolf's head up a bit with her chin.

"And maybe we can go back to the lake every now and then." She said with a smile. "I saw how much you liked swimming in it." She looked off to the side and Dr. Munro nodded with a smile. "Wanna do that?"

Tommy nodded.

"That's another thing." She said as she stood back up and moved back to the podium. "I know its... awkward.... And probably cliche since we're wolves now. But we should probably stick close to each other. Look out for each other. Just in case anything goes wrong even while we're out and about."

The back wolves began grumbling again, but she beat them to the chase.

"I'm not saying we have to be friends. And for god's sake I'm not gonna call us a pack." She reassured them. "We're not gonna be that cliche.... But I do think we should at least stay as.... well... this." She said, gesturing at the lot of them. "A support group. After all, we're the only ones who know what we're going through. Even once we're out of here." She looked at Fletcher, and tried not to stare. But she needed the lawyer to know she was talking to the hospital. "And we WILL all get out of here eventually. We should stay in touch. Exchange info and maybe do a monthly meeting, even if only online." She shrugged. "Plus it'll let us keep tabs on each other in case something happens to any of us. By the Government or by just.... people being assholes."

Despite not being fans of the whole situation, even the wolves in the back row could admit that that was probably a good idea.

As the meeting slowly relaxed and opened up to people talking about how they were doing, Dr. Munro stood off to the side suppressing a smile.

She was glad to see that she'd been right about Samantha and her role in the werewolf group.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12i0892/wait_is_this_just_gate_346/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (344/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12d10a4/wait_is_this_just_gate_343/)

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"Do the Orcs.... farm?" He asked. "Like plants and crops?"

"Mmmm there's a few species of plant that are able to survive down there. I don't think they're edible, though I do believe they use them to make soup stocks and broths. Could be wrong though." Alixan said with a shrug. "We sure can't eat them."

The group of them, Alixan, James, Amina, Gorna, and Glag, plus a small cohort of Alixan's Griffin riders flying overhead arrived at the massive wooden platform that stood elevated by about twenty feet above the edge of the Crag. One side of it was easy, slightly taller than normal, wooden stairs that would have looked at home on any house's deck back on Earth. The other half of the structure was a wide open ramp, and James could see indentations worn in, he was certain, by hundreds or even thousands of carts and wagons being hauled up and down them.

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He'd alerted castle's lead soldier, the massive elf known as the Guardian, and had been allowed to confirm his suspicion by smelling one of the samples that had been recovered after their small skirmish with the Agency's massive Golem construct.

Now he had a slightly different plan.

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He greeted the two guards outside of the suite.

"Official business." He said. "Bit of an emergency... ish." He said as the guards looked at him curiously. But they stepped aside.

He entered the suite that had been set aside for Driscoll, Five, and their three remaining toolies, who were effectively their caregivers and makeshift therapists now that they didn't require their suits. The three people had known them longer than anyone else in the castle. One of them was even part of the team that had put Five in her original cybernetic body years ago.

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He wasn't surprised to see Driscoll and Five already waiting for him. Driscoll was, like him, effectively nocturnal now. And even if he wasn't dawn was only an hour or so away now, and Five had insane energy levels.

"What'd you find?" Driscoll asked as the two of them locked eyes for a moment. Then he nodded at the bundle. "Highly doubt it was those."

"No it wasn't. It was the thing that you were willing to convert to fight." Vickers admitted. Then he turned to Five. "Mind grabbin' your doc?" He asked.

Five looked at him curiously, then hopped over to the door that the senior of the three toolies resided behind. She knocked on the door and then listened closely, a moment later she poked her head into the room and spoke to the man inside.

"You found the Agency?" Driscoll said, the anger in his voice evident. "Here?"

"Yeah." Vickers. Then he pointed at the wooden cup on the small table next to Driscoll. "Toss me that."

Driscoll looked at the cup then picked it up. Vickers held his hand up and waited. Then the fox wound back just a bit, before he snapped his long arm forward quickly.

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"We don't need to wear the deathmasks of our friends to do it!" Five said harshly.

"Can you even AIM a weapon without them?" Vickers shot back even more harshly. "Did either of you ever even touch a weapon before you got into those tin cans? Cause I'll bet you hadn't. And now you got new INHUMAN bodies that you aint even used to."

"We only got these bodies so we could live." Driscoll countered. "And because you said it would help me hunt those pieces of shit down."

"And it will. And if we had a month or two to move I'd be cool with that." Vickers said. "But we don't. The Agency decided to shit on our front porch and now we're runnin' after 'em-" He pointed at Shaw. "almost literally in our PJ's. So unless you're certain you can hold up in a fight in your current state. You ether wear the damn helmets.... Or you sit on the fuckin' bench until next time."

"He's right." Dr. Shaw weighed in unexpectedly.

"What?" Driscoll asked incredulously.

"We did motor testing with you when you got back earlier remember?" The doctor asked. "Your reflexes are good but your hand eye coordination is garbage right now." He shook his head. "The Chief is correct. Given a few months you'd likely be more than capable of fighting as efficiently as before. But not yet."

Five nodded hesitantly.

"You too?" Driscoll asked with disbelief.

"He's right Driz." She said. "And about the weapons thing too. I never touched a gun in my life before I got in the suit. Never would've either. And we... well. We can't exactly say we have muscle memory about it... caaaauuuse we never used muscles to do anything."

THAT finally got through to him. It was one thing for Vickers to say it. And another for doc Shaw to say it. Neither of them knew what being IN one of the suits was like.

But Five did.

"Think about it boss." She said. "How would you hit a target moving on a jetski from the back of a hover insertion bird?"

He sighed, realizing with that one question exactly what she meant.

"Engage high mobility interception ballistics, gyro stabilize arms, account for visible wave form interference." He said, as if answering an instructor back in training.

"Fire on green." They both said at once.

Then five turned to Vickers. "How would you hit a guy on a jetski in that situation?" She asked.

"Weapon?" He asked back.

"Standard CT."

He shrugged. "Lead em by a few yards. Wait for the turbulence to die down in my bird. Spray a burst or two and adjust as needed."

She held one of her hands up in his direction.

Driscoll deflated.

He knew intellectually that that was effectively what the commands he'd listed would have told a suit to do. But he had to admit that he himself didn't actually know HOW to do those things. Vickers clearly did.

Hell, a few days earlier he'd been struggling to walk. He still did a bit.

He sighed.

"Fine." He said finally.

"I know it sucks." Vickers said with genuine sympathy. "But it's the only way I can think of to keep you guys in the fight until we can get you properly trained up. Suit or no suit you guys still have years of tactical experience over anyone in this castle besides myself. Hell, you got a lot more than Choi. Your minds will be your biggest asset until we can get you used to these new bodies."

Driscoll nodded. He had to smile a bit as Five jumped up and tapped a knuckle to his forehead on one of the downward nods.

"I'll take proper care of these." Dr. Shaw said, holding up the two helmets for emphasis. "And I'll make sure to pay respect to the others."

"Thanks doc." He said.

He still hadn't completely had a chance to deal with the loss of his team. Between the Agency's kidnapping him, the drug induced haze he'd had to stay in to survive afterwords, and the transformation into his new form. He hadn't had a chance to properly grieve his lost friends. And now he was going to be wearing one of their faces.

He turned and looked at Vickers.

"What did you find?" He asked.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12fufwk/wait_is_this_just_gate_345/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (344/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12d0wti/wait_is_this_just_gate_343/) /
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"Can you even AIM a weapon without them?" Vickers shot back even more harshly. "Did either of you ever even touch a weapon before you got into those tin cans? Cause I'll bet you hadn't. And now you got new INHUMAN bodies that you aint even used to."

"We only got these bodies so we could live." Driscoll countered. "And because you said it would help me hunt those pieces of shit down."

"And it will. And if we had a month or two to move I'd be cool with that." Vickers said. "But we don't. The Agency decided to shit on our front porch and now we're runnin' after 'em-" He pointed at Shaw. "almost literally in our PJ's. So unless you're certain you can hold up in a fight in your current state. You ether wear the damn helmets.... Or you sit on the fuckin' bench until next time."

"He's right." Dr. Shaw weighed in unexpectedly.

"What?" Driscoll asked incredulously.

"We did motor testing with you when you got back earlier remember?" The doctor asked. "Your reflexes are good but your hand eye coordination is garbage right now." He shook his head. "The Chief is correct. Given a few months you'd likely be more than capable of fighting as efficiently as before. But not yet."

Five nodded hesitantly.

"You too?" Driscoll asked with disbelief.

"He's right Driz." She said. "And about the weapons thing too. I never touched a gun in my life before I got in the suit. Never would've either. And we... well. We can't exactly say we have muscle memory about it... caaaauuuse we never used muscles to do anything."

THAT finally got through to him. It was one thing for Vickers to say it. And another for doc Shaw to say it. Neither of them knew what being IN one of the suits was like.

But Five did.

"Think about it boss." She said. "How would you hit a target moving on a jetski from the back of a hover insertion bird?"

He sighed, realizing with that one question exactly what she meant.

"Engage high mobility interception ballistics, gyro stabilize arms, account for visible wave form interference." He said, as if answering an instructor back in training.

"Fire on green." They both said at once.

Then five turned to Vickers. "How would you hit a guy on a jetski in that situation?" She asked.

"Weapon?" He asked back.

"Standard CT."

He shrugged. "Lead em by a few yards. Wait for the turbulence to die down in my bird. Spray a burst or two and adjust as needed."

She held one of her hands up in his direction.

Driscoll deflated.

He knew intellectually that that was effectively what the commands he'd listed would have told a suit to do. But he had to admit that he himself didn't actually know HOW to do those things. Vickers clearly did.

Hell, a few days earlier he'd been struggling to walk. He still did a bit.

He sighed.

"Fine." He said finally.

"I know it sucks." Vickers said with genuine sympathy. "But it's the only way I can think of to keep you guys in the fight until we can get you properly trained up. Suit or no suit you guys still have years of tactical experience over anyone in this castle besides myself. Hell, you got a lot more than Choi. Your minds will be your biggest asset until we can get you used to these new bodies."

Driscoll nodded. He had to smile a bit as Five jumped up and tapped a knuckle to his forehead on one of the downward nods.

"I'll take proper care of these." Dr. Shaw said, holding up the two helmets for emphasis. "And I'll make sure to pay respect to the others."

"Thanks doc." He said.

He still hadn't completely had a chance to deal with the loss of his team. Between the Agency's kidnapping him, the drug induced haze he'd had to stay in to survive afterwords, and the transformation into his new form. He hadn't had a chance to properly grieve his lost friends. And now he was going to be wearing one of their faces.

He turned and looked at Vickers.

"What did you find?" He asked.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12fuakj/wait_is_this_just_gate_345/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (343/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12c1p1d/wait_is_this_just_gate_342/)

Writer's note: First ever 100% Vickers chapter.

Enjoy

\~

Vickers stalked across the roofs and down the side alleys of the Petravian capital like a wraith as he followed the scent from the castle.

His keen hearing and the reflective layers in his eyes allowed him to avoid the occasional nocturnal people that he came across, the people who worked night jobs, the tavern goers, and the occasional guard patrols, with incredible ease. The only people who seemed to notice him were the occasional were-folk that he came across. And they mostly seemed to simply acknowledge him and then return to their duties. Though most of them still kept their heads pointed his way, or at least their ears.

He felt mild annoyance any time that happened. The part of his brain that wasn't quite his anymore didn't like it when things noticed him. And it liked it even less when they noticed him and DIDN'T panic. The wolves were the worst. They not only noticed him, but routinely locked eyes with him and engaged in short lived staring contests. He hated having to be the one to break the lock.

But, so far as he could tell, none of them were his problem.

He kept on the scent.

As he neared the outskirts of town he came across a problem. At one of the main crossroads, just inside of the eastern city entrance, he came across branches in the path that the scent had taken. The path he was on led, naturally, back the way he'd come to the castle.

But branching off down a significantly wider street was a scent path MUCH stronger than the one he'd followed.

That annoying animal part of his brain told him that THIS was the path to follow, to hell with the one leading out past the guard post and out of the city. His prey had gone THAT way, toward the refugee housing of the city.

But he had to do his diligence.

Vickers dropped from the rooftop into the alley next to it. His shoe-less feet made barely a whisper as he landed on the dirt there.

He quickly put his pistol away and pulled out his identification papers before stepping out into the street. About ten yards from the post one of the guards spotted him.

"Evening sir." The soldier said as they tapped on their buddies shoulder. "Bit late for a stroll. Everything okay?"

"Yeah." Vickers replied, offering the papers to the young orc sergeant. "Just following a bit of a trail."

The sergeant looked over the papers, nodding as she saw his status as a companion to the summoned hero, and a visitor from Earth.

"Anything we need to worry about?" She asked curiously as she handed the papers back and held her hand out for the logbook. She started writing down about the encounter.

"Don't know yet." He admitted. "Anything weird come through here today? Any of the wolves or other folk on duty notice any strange smells?"

She finished writing the last little bit of info about Vickers visit down before signing her name. "'Fraid you'll have to be more specific sir." She said as she began to leaf through the other pages to see what else had been reported throughout the day. "Five Drakrid riders. One woolyyong wagon. A troupe of druids. Some kind of Elven bard with weird paint on his face." She looked at him with a bit of sympathy as she pointed at the road leading out of the city. "This is one of our big entrances. The road you're on leads to both the new refugee district AND the tail end of Trade Road."

Vickers nodded. He'd figured as much.

"Well, how bout a group of new recruits?" He asked. "Led by a Sergeant, looked like an elf woman."

The sergeant looked back at the logs.

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He nodded again. It made sense not to talk about troop movements, even if they were just recruits.

"They come WITH anyone that you can tell me about?" He asked with a look of desperation.

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"Few wagons full of Refugees and laborers from the east." She said. Then she pointed back at the intersection where he knew the scent trails had split. "Woulda split up there and went their separate ways I reckon. Probably just traveled together out of convenience."

"Thank you." He said with a small bow. "If you log this too just put a note in there for Clerk Tedrias to associate it with that group's visit too."

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She watched as Vickers turned and began walking down the road she'd indicated. Then he entered the shade of one of the buildings and seem to disappear into the darkness. She tried to watch to see where he went, but saw no sign of him.

"Don't go trying to hide from that guy apparently." The other guard on duty, Prabin, said as he took the log book from her. "Weird bunch of folks those Earthers."

"Yeah, as if you've ever met one of em before." She, partly, agreed as she turned back. "We'd better make sure nobody comes up dead or missing for the next couple days."

Vickers listened from where he'd slunk into the shadows. He reminded himself that being noticed AND remembered by guards was occasionally useful in an operation. It wasn't something that came up too often. But sometimes you had to be seen to get stuff done.

Besides, the guard sergeant had given him some good intel. Now he knew that he was looking for a few wagons and a group of refugees. That didn't narrow his search down too much. He'd already know that the path led to the refugee housing. But it was better than simply following ONLY his nose.

Once the guards had returned to their post fully, though the sergeant kept occasionally glancing in his general direction, he moved fast and low and silent down the narrow side street and back up to the roofs.

His hunt continued.

And only an hour or so later, the air was pungent with the scent of the thing he'd been tracking. At least to him it was.

It smelled coppery, rotten and like it was full of old stone and vinegar. He could feel magic soaking into the area in a wave. And as he took the fullness of the scent into his mind, clinging to the side of a small bell tower and hiding in its shadow, he knew what it was.

It was blood.

But not just blood. It was old blood. Blood that had been mixed with some kind of chemicals and other materials. Something foul and disgusting and oozing with-

Wait. He thought as the recognition struck him like lightning. *Blood.... Stone.... Magic?*

He stared down, his eyes widening in realization, at the rows upon rows of houses and temporary tents and wagon beds that made up the refugee portion of the city while the King's men continued to rebuild.

The golems.

The hair on running down his back stood on edge immediately as he thought the word and felt the truth of it.

He'd shot one of these things in the face right before blowing up the agency. He'd smelled it then, even though his human nose and mind hadn't had the precision to catalog it like he could now. Then he'd saved Choi from a massive version of the thing that had actually been a blended group of them working together. He'd been literally elbow deep in the golem then, as he'd literally punched it to bits.

And now, with his new nose and animal instincts, he had smelled it again. And the animal inside of him hadn't been putting him on the hunt for prey. It had warned him of a dangerous intruder to his territory. Something it knew from HIS mind was a threat and needed to be dealt with.

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With Choi gone he couldn't count on an accidental explosion or a poorly timed duel, or something like that to unveil them by mistake. Nor could he count on a blight monster leading him straight to them.

They were here. Mixed into the tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people that lived in the capital. And they'd come with their golems, and as part of a group of travelers.

And they had people infiltrating the castle guard.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12e0qaj/wait_is_this_just_gate_344/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (343/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12c1jfz/wait_is_this_just_gate_342/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12e0n05/wait_is_this_just_gate_344/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (342/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12b0yrc/wait_is_this_just_gate_341/)

Writer's note: James has always been cheesy for Amina. But let's be real. Given his power set, we'd all do the same thing for our significant others. Least I would anyways.

SUPERMAN THAT *completely respectable woman whom I care about deeply.*

Enjoy.

\~

"So... that's a view." James said as he and Amina offloaded their bags and belongings in the room Alixan had set aside for them.

"Alixan was always a bit of a show off." Amina replied as she dropped her bag on the bed and joined him next to the window overlooking the small porch/perch outside their room.

It was nearly nightfall now and the sun was setting almost directly in front of their room's view. Dead center in the view was the Draidian township, it's large walls casting long shadows toward the spire they were currently in. To the left of that was the massive void of the Crag, which swirled with the deadly gas that made it virtually impassible for humans. And to the right, albeit distantly, was the edge of the forest that they'd emerged from earlier in the day. Behind all of it the planets rings caught the light of the setting sun and refracted it just a bit, causing an almost aurora like light show just above the horizon.

"Does the sun always do that with the rings?" James asked. "Never seen it do that before."

"This far south." Amina said as she pulled James's pack off his shoulders for him. "And this high up off the ground? Yes."

James thought for a moment.

"Does.... going higher let you see more of that?" He asked.

"It does."

"And your brother said that the griffins wouldn't attack us unless we went near their nests. Right?" He followed up.

"Yeah." She replied. "Why?"

"Come with me." He said as he held his hand out, and placed the other on the handle of the door leading out to the open air.

She took it without hesitation, she always would, and James pulled her out onto the balcony with him.

"Trust me?" He asked.

"Of course."

"Then hold on. I've wanted to do this for a while now." He said, then nodded at the light show. "That's as good a reason as any to do it."

"What are you going to do?" She asked as she moved closer, and his wolf arm wrapped around her.

"Steal a move from a ton of super hero movies." He said with a wink. Then he began to sing softly. "Come fly with me. Let's fly. Let's fly away." He began with a smile.

And that was what they did.

\------------------------

Vickers walked slowly, and calmly, as he moved through the castle courtyard.

He paused every few yards and took long, deep, breaths through his nose, drinking in the scents of the day so that his not fully jaguar nose could focus on them.

The nightly guard patrol crossed his path once, challenged him, and he simply explained that he'd had a long day and was out for a walk to relax and get some fresh air. He was wearing simple pants and one of his military undershirts, and he had no bag or weapons (that could be seen). So they let him go and told him not to make any kind of commotion. Vickers nodded and continued on.

The scent was strongest near the gate, and over near the barracks and training yards. But he'd already expected that.

He figured, as long as they were with the other soldiers and under watch, they would be fairly safe. He'd already told the king's staff that he was following a hunch he had, and to keep an eye on the new recruits. But he had also admitted that he wasn't sure what the hunch was yet, just that he had one.

Vickers walked out the side gate that he and the two Muck Marchers had entered earlier, letting the guards there know that he'd be back in the morning. They logged it in their books and jokingly told him to have a pint in their memory. Vickers chuckled a bit, and lied back that he would.

Then he began walking into the city, still occasionally slowing down to sniff the air.

Once he was out of the sight of the walls, he pulled his bottomless bag out from where it had been tucked into his pant leg, retrieved his pistol, shield, and short sword, and equipped them to his torso and waist.

Then he disappeared into the shadow of a shop of some kind.

And began to hunt.

\----------

"Okay. I know that both jaguars AND Navy SEALS are stealth oriented killers." Five said from where she and Driscoll were perched (one of them more comfortably than the other) in one of the trees just outside the castle courtyard. "But even I think that's cliche as fuck."

"Doesn't matter." Driscoll replied. "We were right. He's hunting something. Has been since before we even got back today."

"And?" Five asked. "That's his problem. I don't know about you foxes. But I don't think squirrels are nocturnal. At least I'm not. We should go back." She said before yawning. "Besides. We're still getting used to having bodies again. We'll only slow him down."

As if on cue they watched with only a little awe as the massive were-jaguar leapt up to the roof of one of the buildings with a single, massive, jump. He also landed with almost no sound at all. Then he began stalking across the rooftops.

"You're probably right." Driscoll said. "Though its not like the guards to our rooms know we're gone. They didn't bar our windows, they clearly didn't expect us to leap from them."

"Good thing the chief wasn't lying about that ability." She said as they dropped from the tree and began silently bounding forward in the same direction as Vickers, using the streets instead of the roofs.

Driscoll was, naturally, much faster than Five in their new forms. He was taller and longer limbed, so his strides took him much further much easier. But he was also lanky and, as she'd pointed out already, still getting used to the new body. He also had to duck or dodge some of the low hanging shop signs to avoid hitting his head. He also struggled with the cobbling of the streets, which was awkward for his disproportionately small feet.

She, on the other hand, scrambled on all fours. The result was that she legitimately looked like a massive squirrel, and was able to dart over, under, and around, all the obstacles that he had to avoid the hard way, and was also more than capable of running up and down buildings, allowing her to cut off entire blocks as they traveled. Plus, she had taken to her new body much more comfortably than he had.

Still, they made good time, and his nose kept them on the chief's trail as the massive man leaped and bounded across rooftops, stopping occasionally to scent the air.

Or at least they were making good time, until they ran down one of the many streets of the capital and a massive hulking form slammed into the ground right in front of Driscoll with a low growl.

"What are you doing out here?" Vickers asked as he stood up to his full form. He still only came up to Driscoll's shoulders. But the intimidation was still there as the feline eyes glared at both of them. "You should have turned back. I didn't think you'd make it past that tree."

"You knew we followed you?" Five asked as she perched on a nearby cart. She flinched back as Vickers turned that angry gaze on her.

"I've smelled you since just after I left my room." He replied. "I figured it was just you two being curious. But you need to go back."

"Where are you going?" Driscoll asked as he stalked around the Chief and looked at his weapons and shield. "And why are you armed?"

"I don't know where." Vickers replied a little angrily. "THAT'S why I'm armed."

"Why though?" Five asked as she absent mindedly groomed one of her ears with her hand.

"A fucking hunch." Vickers shot back. "Now go back or I'll call the guards." Then he pulled out the little purple glowing device linked to the bands around their ankles. "And drag you back myself."

The two of them flinched back just a little.

"We just want to help." Driscoll said hesitantly. "And learn what we're capable of."

"Then meet me in the training yard at ass crack o' dawn o'clock." Vickers said with zero remorse. "Go back now or I DRAG. YOU. BACK." He hissed out through clenched teeth. "I don't even know if what I'm thinking is right or not. Might just be some weird ass perfume or something."

"You're sneaking out of the castle armed for battle for some weird ass perfume?" Five asked with a grin. "Your wolf girlfriend back in town? Didn't know you guys fought for foreplay. Course I don't know much about you guys anyways."

Vickers sighed. Then pressed the button on the purple device.

Five was pulled from the side of the cart in a crash, even as Driscoll slammed onto his back and began sliding on the ground.

"I told you to go back." He said as he began walking back toward the castle. "Now checking this damn hunch is gonna take me all the way to dawn. God dammit."

"Okay okay!" Driscoll half yelled. "Quit with the magic bullshit!"

Vickers kept walking, causing the two of them slide along the cobbled street even as Five scrabbled desperately for a hold.

"Gonna head back to the castle?" He asked as he kept his thumb on the device.

Heads were starting to poke out of windows now, causing Vickers to get even more annoyed.

But he kept walking.

"Nothing to see here folks." He said to a dwarven couple that popped out of their upstairs window. "Just bringing back some escaped criminals."

"We're not..." Driscoll began to retort. Then he remembered that they were actually P.O.W.s. "Okay. Technically we're prisoners. But not THAT kind of prisoner."

"Tomato, tomato." Vickers said, making a point of NOT pronouncing them differently. "Are you gonna go back to the castle?"

"YES!" The both of them replied at once.

Vickers took his thumb off the device. The force pulling at their ankles ceased immediately and Five quickly scrambled over behind the corner of a small flower shop that was currently closed.

"Aaaaah." Vickers said with a pointed finger.

"Don't use that!" She begged, and Vickers actually felt a pang of regret at the fear in it. "That thing... and your size... made the squirrel part of me freak the fuck out!"

Vickers deflated a bit as he turned away. He waved at a couple of the people looking out their windows and put on a fake smile that he ensured didn't have any teeth.

"The fox part of me wasn't too keen on that either." Driscoll weighed in.

Vickers put the device back in his pocket.

"Go back to the castle." He said simply. "You said you would. Hold to that. You trusted my decision to have you turned. Trust this one. Go back."

Driscoll dusted himself off as he stood up, leaning on a bit of fencing as he did. "We will." He said once he'd stood up fully.

Vickers waited for a moment, watching as they slowly moved past him. Normally he would have thought that they looked like they had their tails between their legs. But in Driscoll's case he actually did.

"Sorry about that." He said as Five moved near him. "I didn't think of that when I used it."

"It's fine." She said quickly and quietly. "It's fine."

Then the two of them left, heading the way they'd come. Vickers watched them go.

"Remember your own fuckin lessons idiot." He said to himself.

Then he raised his head, took a long sniff of the air.

And went back to work.

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"Yes." Marcos agreed. "And a brilliant mind from what I saw the few times I saw him train with you. Plus the doorways." He nodded a bit. "And that rather... unusual... way he had of flying..... An odd pair of brothers. Mother is a mage too? A healer I understand."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (342/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12b0rh6/wait_is_this_just_gate_341/) /
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Writer's note: James has always been cheesy for Amina. But let's be real. Given his power set, we'd all do the same thing for our significant others. Least I would anyways.

SUPERMAN THAT *completely respectable woman whom I care about deeply.*

Enjoy.

\~

"So... that's a view." James said as he and Amina offloaded their bags and belongings in the room Alixan had set aside for them.

"Alixan was always a bit of a show off." Amina replied as she dropped her bag on the bed and joined him next to the window overlooking the small porch/perch outside their room.

It was nearly nightfall now and the sun was setting almost directly in front of their room's view. Dead center in the view was the Draidian township, it's large walls casting long shadows toward the spire they were currently in. To the left of that was the massive void of the Crag, which swirled with the deadly gas that made it virtually impassible for humans. And to the right, albeit distantly, was the edge of the forest that they'd emerged from earlier in the day. Behind all of it the planets rings caught the light of the setting sun and refracted it just a bit, causing an almost aurora like light show just above the horizon.

"Does the sun always do that with the rings?" James asked. "Never seen it do that before."

"This far south." Amina said as she pulled James's pack off his shoulders for him. "And this high up off the ground? Yes."

James thought for a moment.

"Does.... going higher let you see more of that?" He asked.

"It does."

"And your brother said that the griffins wouldn't attack us unless we went near their nests. Right?" He followed up.

"Yeah." She replied. "Why?"

"Come with me." He said as he held his hand out, and placed the other on the handle of the door leading out to the open air.

She took it without hesitation, she always would, and James pulled her out onto the balcony with him.

"Trust me?" He asked.

"Of course."

"Then hold on. I've wanted to do this for a while now." He said, then nodded at the light show. "That's as good a reason as any to do it."

"What are you going to do?" She asked as she moved closer, and his wolf arm wrapped around her.

"Steal a move from a ton of super hero movies." He said with a wink. Then he began to sing softly. "Come fly with me. Let's fly. Let's fly away." He began with a smile.

And that was what they did.

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Vickers walked slowly, and calmly, as he moved through the castle courtyard.

He paused every few yards and took long, deep, breaths through his nose, drinking in the scents of the day so that his not fully jaguar nose could focus on them.

The nightly guard patrol crossed his path once, challenged him, and he simply explained that he'd had a long day and was out for a walk to relax and get some fresh air. He was wearing simple pants and one of his military undershirts, and he had no bag or weapons (that could be seen). So they let him go and told him not to make any kind of commotion. Vickers nodded and continued on.

The scent was strongest near the gate, and over near the barracks and training yards. But he'd already expected that.

He figured, as long as they were with the other soldiers and under watch, they would be fairly safe. He'd already told the king's staff that he was following a hunch he had, and to keep an eye on the new recruits. But he had also admitted that he wasn't sure what the hunch was yet, just that he had one.

Vickers walked out the side gate that he and the two Muck Marchers had entered earlier, letting the guards there know that he'd be back in the morning. They logged it in their books and jokingly told him to have a pint in their memory. Vickers chuckled a bit, and lied back that he would.

Then he began walking into the city, still occasionally slowing down to sniff the air.

Once he was out of the sight of the walls, he pulled his bottomless bag out from where it had been tucked into his pant leg, retrieved his pistol, shield, and short sword, and equipped them to his torso and waist.

Then he disappeared into the shadow of a shop of some kind.

And began to hunt.

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"Okay. I know that both jaguars AND Navy SEALS are stealth oriented killers." Five said from where she and Driscoll were perched (one of them more comfortably than the other) in one of the trees just outside the castle courtyard. "But even I think that's cliche as fuck."

"Doesn't matter." Driscoll replied. "We were right. He's hunting something. Has been since before we even got back today."

"And?" Five asked. "That's his problem. I don't know about you foxes. But I don't think squirrels are nocturnal. At least I'm not. We should go back." She said before yawning. "Besides. We're still getting used to having bodies again. We'll only slow him down."

As if on cue they watched with only a little awe as the massive were-jaguar leapt up to the roof of one of the buildings with a single, massive, jump. He also landed with almost no sound at all. Then he began stalking across the rooftops.

"You're probably right." Driscoll said. "Though its not like the guards to our rooms know we're gone. They didn't bar our windows, they clearly didn't expect us to leap from them."

"Good thing the chief wasn't lying about that ability." She said as they dropped from the tree and began silently bounding forward in the same direction as Vickers, using the streets instead of the roofs.

Driscoll was, naturally, much faster than Five in their new forms. He was taller and longer limbed, so his strides took him much further much easier. But he was also lanky and, as she'd pointed out already, still getting used to the new body. He also had to duck or dodge some of the low hanging shop signs to avoid hitting his head. He also struggled with the cobbling of the streets, which was awkward for his disproportionately small feet.

She, on the other hand, scrambled on all fours. The result was that she legitimately looked like a massive squirrel, and was able to dart over, under, and around, all the obstacles that he had to avoid the hard way, and was also more than capable of running up and down buildings, allowing her to cut off entire blocks as they traveled. Plus, she had taken to her new body much more comfortably than he had.

Still, they made good time, and his nose kept them on the chief's trail as the massive man leaped and bounded across rooftops, stopping occasionally to scent the air.

Or at least they were making good time, until they ran down one of the many streets of the capital and a massive hulking form slammed into the ground right in front of Driscoll with a low growl.

"What are you doing out here?" Vickers asked as he stood up to his full form. He still only came up to Driscoll's shoulders. But the intimidation was still there as the feline eyes glared at both of them. "You should have turned back. I didn't think you'd make it past that tree."

"You knew we followed you?" Five asked as she perched on a nearby cart. She flinched back as Vickers turned that angry gaze on her.

"I've smelled you since just after I left my room." He replied. "I figured it was just you two being curious. But you need to go back."

"Where are you going?" Driscoll asked as he stalked around the Chief and looked at his weapons and shield. "And why are you armed?"

"I don't know where." Vickers replied a little angrily. "THAT'S why I'm armed."

"Why though?" Five asked as she absent mindedly groomed one of her ears with her hand.

"A fucking hunch." Vickers shot back. "Now go back or I'll call the guards." Then he pulled out the little purple glowing device linked to the bands around their ankles. "And drag you back myself."

The two of them flinched back just a little.

"We just want to help." Driscoll said hesitantly. "And learn what we're capable of."

"Then meet me in the training yard at ass crack o' dawn o'clock." Vickers said with zero remorse. "Go back now or I DRAG. YOU. BACK." He hissed out through clenched teeth. "I don't even know if what I'm thinking is right or not. Might just be some weird ass perfume or something."

"You're sneaking out of the castle armed for battle for some weird ass perfume?" Five asked with a grin. "Your wolf girlfriend back in town? Didn't know you guys fought for foreplay. Course I don't know much about you guys anyways."

Vickers sighed. Then pressed the button on the purple device.

Five was pulled from the side of the cart in a crash, even as Driscoll slammed onto his back and began sliding on the ground.

"I told you to go back." He said as he began walking back toward the castle. "Now checking this damn hunch is gonna take me all the way to dawn. God dammit."

"Okay okay!" Driscoll half yelled. "Quit with the magic bullshit!"

Vickers kept walking, causing the two of them slide along the cobbled street even as Five scrabbled desperately for a hold.

"Gonna head back to the castle?" He asked as he kept his thumb on the device.

Heads were starting to poke out of windows now, causing Vickers to get even more annoyed.

But he kept walking.

"Nothing to see here folks." He said to a dwarven couple that popped out of their upstairs window. "Just bringing back some escaped criminals."

"We're not..." Driscoll began to retort. Then he remembered that they were actually P.O.W.s. "Okay. Technically we're prisoners. But not THAT kind of prisoner."

"Tomato, tomato." Vickers said, making a point of NOT pronouncing them differently. "Are you gonna go back to the castle?"

"YES!" The both of them replied at once.

Vickers took his thumb off the device. The force pulling at their ankles ceased immediately and Five quickly scrambled over behind the corner of a small flower shop that was currently closed.

"Aaaaah." Vickers said with a pointed finger.

"Don't use that!" She begged, and Vickers actually felt a pang of regret at the fear in it. "That thing... and your size... made the squirrel part of me freak the fuck out!"

Vickers deflated a bit as he turned away. He waved at a couple of the people looking out their windows and put on a fake smile that he ensured didn't have any teeth.

"The fox part of me wasn't too keen on that either." Driscoll weighed in.

Vickers put the device back in his pocket.

"Go back to the castle." He said simply. "You said you would. Hold to that. You trusted my decision to have you turned. Trust this one. Go back."

Driscoll dusted himself off as he stood up, leaning on a bit of fencing as he did. "We will." He said once he'd stood up fully.

Vickers waited for a moment, watching as they slowly moved past him. Normally he would have thought that they looked like they had their tails between their legs. But in Driscoll's case he actually did.

"Sorry about that." He said as Five moved near him. "I didn't think of that when I used it."

"It's fine." She said quickly and quietly. "It's fine."

Then the two of them left, heading the way they'd come. Vickers watched them go.

"Remember your own fuckin lessons idiot." He said to himself.

Then he raised his head, took a long sniff of the air.

And went back to work.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (341/?)

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[Glag](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/128wod0/wait_is_this_just_glag_glagglag/)

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"Glag." Glag replied.

"Well that answers that." The prince replied. Then he released her and swept James up into a similar hug.

"Hi...." James said awkward. "Brother.... in law??" He said with a questioning look at Amina, who simply smiled.

"Oh just call me Xan." He said as he dropped James down. Then he moved in front of Gorna and bowed slightly, one leg forward while his read leg bent a bit. "And who might you be?" He asked.

Gorna matched the bow, bending forward slightly with the same leg positioning. "Gorna Daggerdancer of the Northern Range."

"Welcome lady of the north." Alixan replied as he stood up. "It's not often that we get northern horders down here in the Petravian south. How did James convince you to join them for the trip?"

"Not me." James said.

Alixan looked over at Amina, whose face was intentionally blank as she looked away.

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James interrupted, saving his wife.

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"Several." Alixan said. "They're quite common here near the Crag. Whether it was this Glag or not is another question entirely."

"Glag." Glag replied as Alixan easily lifted the small (compared to him) rock monster and held him up at arms length for a moment. "Good to meet you Glag." He said with a light shake of the minor elemental.

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"Well. Welcome to Draidia." The prince said. "Follow me. I'll show you to your rooms. I'll have to have a centaur capable set of quarters readied for you Lady Daggerdancer. Who's Glag following?"

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"Glaaaaag."

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"Nice." He said simply. Then he looked back at Gorna and pointed at his little sister. "Same?"

Gorna blushed. "She.... rode me." She replied. "And defeated me."

The crown prince turned back to his sister with a huge grin.

"Don't even start." She said before he had a chance.

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"Chief?" Driscoll asked curiously. "What's wrong?"

Vickers took a deep inhale, letting the scent go deep into his mind.

"Nothing." He said. " Just an odd smell. New for me. Come on. Let's get you guys settled."

But as they walked, he watched the Sergeant and her recruits warily.

"All new smells to me." Five said from where she was walking, a large bar of nuts and seeds with honey in her hand. "I did NOT... realize that so many of you guys walk around with piss on your pants."

"The last few drops only come out AFTER you zip." Vickers said with a look of annoyance.

"I'm just glad to have a dick again." Driscoll said. "Even if it does itch a bit. Fucking fur."

"I'm beginning to regret this." Vickers said so flatly that it was obviously sarcastic. "Also I just realized that I was missing out on SO MANY dickless insults for you."

"Fuck you." Driscoll shot back.

Vickers waved at the guards as they walked through the side gate to the castle. They recognized him easily enough.

"Two new members of the Folk." He said to the guard that looked at his papers. They had the imprint of Choi's medallion on them, tying him to the Captain for castle access purposes. "They're also Earthers like me."

"Glad things went well." The soldier replied. "We were told to expect you. Take em to the administrators to get their papers fixed."

"Got it." He said. Then he nodded at the group of recruits heading over to the soldier barracks. "New meat?"

"Aye, coming from the east coast." The soldier answered. "Next training cycle."

"Hmm. Cool." Vickers said, not sure what else to say. "Well. I'll get these two to the admins."

East coast? He thought. *What have I smelled like that over in the east?*

"Oh I'm climbing that." Five said as she saw the tower on this side of the castle's battlements. "I'm so climbing that."

"NOT." Vickers said, halting her in her path. "Until we get your shit updated."

"Also. We need to learn what we are AND aren't capable of before we start doing things that can kill us." Driscoll said.

"Try not to worry about the dying part." Vickers said. "At least... not from falling."

The two others looked at him curiously.

"I... kinda jumped off the roof one day." He said. "Had to test." They still stared at him. "Hurts the feet. But not much more than that."

"Okay... we're BOTH climbing that thing." Driscoll said.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (341/?)

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"Two new members of the Folk." He said to the guard that looked at his papers. They had the imprint of Choi's medallion on them, tying him to the Captain for castle access purposes. "They're also Earthers like me."

"Glad things went well." The soldier replied. "We were told to expect you. Take em to the administrators to get their papers fixed."

"Got it." He said. Then he nodded at the group of recruits heading over to the soldier barracks. "New meat?"

"Aye, coming from the east coast." The soldier answered. "Next training cycle."

"Hmm. Cool." Vickers said, not sure what else to say. "Well. I'll get these two to the admins."

East coast? He thought. *What have I smelled like that over in the east?*

"Oh I'm climbing that." Five said as she saw the tower on this side of the castle's battlements. "I'm so climbing that."

"NOT." Vickers said, halting her in her path. "Until we get your shit updated."

"Also. We need to learn what we are AND aren't capable of before we start doing things that can kill us." Driscoll said.

"Try not to worry about the dying part." Vickers said. "At least... not from falling."

The two others looked at him curiously.

"I... kinda jumped off the roof one day." He said. "Had to test." They still stared at him. "Hurts the feet. But not much more than that."

"Okay... we're BOTH climbing that thing." Driscoll said.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12c1jfz/wait_is_this_just_gate_342/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (340/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1271xcm/wait_is_this_just_gate_339/)

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Anyways.... ***DUN DUN DUN***

Enjoy.

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"Is that it down there?" James asked as they finally managed to crest the hill they'd been riding up the past thirty minutes or so. "Is that Draidia?"

"Close." Amina said as she peered over his head. "That's the outer burbs- as you call them at the capital- to Draidia." She pointed at the massive vertical spire that rose up nearly a mile to the left of the large, sprawling, town. "That is actually Draidia."

"I thought you said the massive spire was the Griffin's tooth?" He asked.

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Gorna galloped ahead a bit. "By the gods it's massive." She said in surprise. "I'd heard tales. But it still boggles the mind."

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"Look down near the base of it." Amina instructed him as she watched the feed on the tablet. James did as he was told. "That's Draidia. Specifically the castle and base that Alixan uses to defend it in case of attack. See how it's built INTO the Griffin's tooth?

"Yeah. Kinda like some of the Buddhist temples and old Native American desert villages in my world. But like... castle-y."

"You can see all that from here?" Gorna asked as she slowed to join them, looking at the round sunglasses curiously. Amina gestured her over and angled the tablet so she could see. Her eyes widened at the sight of the display.

"Now zoom out a bit." Amina said to James. "Pan out and to the right."

James did, and saw the sparse buildings outside of its wall. Most of them appeared to be tents similar to the ones that James had seen the Petravian army use. Though a lot of them were bordered in black, similar to Alixan's personal army uniforms.

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"Why's it all Military?" James asked curiously. "And why is the civilian population kept separated?"

"The Meridians." Amina said simply. "They have a tendency to send infiltrators and priests to try to get into the civilian population. Xan keeps the city swept clean with constant sweeps of both ground and air troops. But they still get in. They look and talk just like Petravians do. But they don't have the resources to infiltrate Xan's army. He changes the standard uniform every three months. Anyone not matching is captured and interrogated."

And suddenly all of James's uniform inspections throughout the years seemed downright easy.

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James turned the dial on the glasses. The image zoomed, but also got a touch grainier.

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And it looked like it was full of green tea.

"That green stuff inside is the miasma." She educated him. "Comes from underground. And it's another reason to keep the civilian city far back away from it."

"Lethal?" James asked.

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The leader of the group was a tall, somewhat sickly looking, man of about forty. He rode the seat of his wagon next to a large orc who was armed as the convoy guard. Several men and women marched with them, behind a tall elf who wore a royal soldier's uniform. The ones following her had the shaved heads and simple leather armor and red tunics that marked them as fresh trainees for the guard. The second wagon had several more people and a few large, padlocked, chests.

They stopped at the first checkpoint into the city as the soldiers there moved up to inspect them.

The man in the lead wagon calmed his thoughts and tightened the control on his other bodies, ensuring that only HIS body spoke.

The Soldier among them strode up confidently, pulling a set of papers from a pouch on her belt.

"Evening." The Sergeant of the checkpoint greeted them. "Sergeant." He said with a nod to the elf.

"Sergeant." She replied back as she handed him the papers. "New recruits from the coast."

The checkpoint sergeant looked over the papers, then at the recruits. He nodded with a shrug as he handed the papers back. "Log it." He said to the other guards. One of them was walking down the side of the two wagons, the other wrote the report in the logs. "What're you lot here for?" He asked the man in the wagon.

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[\[Glag\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/128wod0/wait_is_this_just_glag_glagglag/)

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12b0yrc/wait_is_this_just_gate_341/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (340/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1271ves/wait_is_this_just_gate_339/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/12b0rh6/wait_is_this_just_gate_341/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (339/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1264gv5/wait_is_this_just_gate_338/)

Writer's note: [*James in the last section.*](https://imgflip.com/i/7ghqwc) *And like 90% of you guys too.*

Also. It may not seem like a Vickers move. But you guys should know by now that if nothing else, he's self aware.

Enjoy.

\~

"How's the overload going?" Vickers asked as he and the two new Folk walked down the street toward the castle. They were moving slowly. Five was eager to run and climb. But Driscoll was still learning the new steering setup on his incredibly long body. "Let me know if it becomes too much."

"Have you been going through this the whole time since your shift?" Driscoll asked as he leaned on the walking stick he'd fashioned out of a garden hoe that had been at the house they'd used. "Everything smells so bad."

"Oh that's nothing." Vickers said. "You got lucky. I shifted closer to full were-form. Your senses are only going to get stronger as the days go by. I'm actually enjoying how toned down mine are right now."

"This is toned down?" Driscoll asked. "I can smell what you had for breakfast a week ago." He said, then pointed at a vendor walking down the street with a basket full of pastries. "And the fact that that guy doesn't wash his hands."

Vickers chuckled a bit as he handed a few coins to the vendor, then took three of the pastries. He tossed one up into the air. Five caught it from where she was hanging from a second floor window. She had adapted to her new body with remarkable speed. The pastry was gone in a single

bite. Then she hung from her feet, sticking out from the building at almost a ninety degree angle, as she licked her hands clean.

Driscoll stared at the pastry with mild disgust. Vickers simply stared at Five in mild amazement. He had to admit just a tiny bit of jealousy at the incredible physical feat.

"I just said that that guy doesn't wash his hands." He said with a grimace. "I don't want that."

Vickers shrugged and popped his into his mouth. "More for me." He said. "It's not like we get diseases any more." His hand was still holding out the extra pastry. "And y'all aint bubble babies anymore."

Driscoll stared at it a bit longer. Then sighed as he reluctantly took it.

He took a bite and his eyes widened in surprise. Then he quickly scarfed down the last few bites.

"Was that raw meat?" He asked in disbelief. "That's so not safe ON TOP of the hand washing thing."

"Almost every vendor in this world has options for members of our kind." Vickers answered calmly. "Hers was Chock Full O' Nuts."

"And delicious." Five weighed in as she scampered down to keep up with the two significantly taller men, her bushy tail twitching rapidly. "I could have twenty of em."

"How do they bake it raw?" Driscoll asked curiously.

"According to Choi they freeze the meat with magic. Then its layered in caramelized sugar or solidified butter before its wrapped in the pastry itself." Vickers said. "Some places, namely the more successful ones, have precisely enchanted needles that they stick in the meat to keep it cold even when baking.

"Huh. That's.... actually clever." Driscoll admitted. "You know a lot about this stuff."

"For the same reason that you can probably list off pressures and temps for the deepest parts of different oceans. Or why any of us three can look at a wall and know exactly what kind of incoming fire it can protect us from." Vickers replied as he held an arm out to stop the two of them and let a carriage pass before they crossed the street. "Or why you can probably look at a pile of parts and machinery and know what to pull from what so you can do emergency repairs on those suits of yours."

"Necessary for survival in the field." Five said, beating Driscoll to the punch. "Useful intel if caught out on your own."

"Well." Vickers said with a tilt of his head. "Yes and no. I doubt that BAKING methods will ever be the difference between life and death for

any of us. That's mostly just a cat being curious. But it is still useful."

The three of them walked in silence for a bit. People greeted them kindly, especially Driscoll and Five, both of whom were wearing the white robes that marked them as newly converted. When they passed close enough to members of the folk, they would frequently greet them with a hand on their shoulders as they passed. Driscoll returned the greetings somewhat awkwardly, whereas Five mostly flinched back until she realized what was happening. Instincts were difficult to grow accustomed to.

"Another thing that will be useful." Vickers said as they went around a corner. "Is also relearning gentleness."

"Gentleness?" Five asked. "Odd coming from the man that caved my chest in with fire and ice."

Vickers grinned a bit at the memory, causing her to shy away a bit before he covered his teeth again.

"How did that smile make you feel?" He asked.

She glared at him for a moment. "Cheap shot." She shot back.

"And yet it is something I have to be aware of now." Vickers lectured. "My smile is disconcerting even for normal people. For a prey-drive person like you, or for kids or something it's even worse." He flexed an arm and the leather of his jacket groaned from the strain. "I can be scary without even using my ACTUAL strength. I have to be careful with it."

Driscoll nodded understanding.

"Remember the egg test Five?" He asked.

"Uuuuugh. Took me weeks to pass that." She admitted.

"Same. And yet only a few weeks ago you could have juggled ten of them with your suit without even cracking any." Driscoll countered. "That's what the Chief is talking about."

"That some thing where you had to carry an egg without breaking it?" Vickers asked, legitimately curious. He still didn't know a lot about the Muck Marchers or their training.

"Through an obstacle course." Five answered. "Then once you passed that you had to do it again through a kill house."

Even without a multi-million dollar mechanical suit that worked based on nervous system input, Vickers couldn't imagine passing that test easily. Though he was tempted to try.

"Then yeah." He said instead of revealing his thoughts. "That's pretty much what I'm trying to say. First time I shook someone's hand after my

change, well a normal person's hand anyways, I damn near crushed the poor guys bones. And to me it felt light enough to leave soda can undented."

The two of them already knew what he was talking about. They'd both already done small tests of their strength before they'd been released from the house. Driscoll had crushed a piece of thick walled pottery into dust with hardly any strain at all, and the singular cut he sustained had healed in a matter of moments. Five had pulled a coconut like fruit from the food supply she'd been given, and had cracked it open in seconds using only her hands and teeth. The nut meat inside had tasted oddly like a cross between walnut and some kind of light mango flavor. She wanted more of them.

"So." Vickers said, breaking them both out of their thoughts. "First things first." He stopped in front of a door and they looked up to see a sign that, while they couldn't understand it, clearly indicated some kind of tailor. "Let's get you guys some proper clothes ordered. Then let's get to the castle and see what you're actually capable of. On either side of the equation."

Then he opened the door for them and beckoned them in.

\----------

"Alright guys." James said with a huge grin as he approached the campfire. "I got it."

He quickly stepped aside to reveal Glag.

"Hello Glag." Amina said sarcastically. "Glad you could join us."

"Glag." The rock monster replied.

"Watch this." James said, ignoring the jab. "Glag! Are you made of rock?"

"Glag!" He replied while raising his hand up above his head.

"Are you made of water?" James asked.

"Glag." This time he lowered his hand down almost to the ground. His arm stretched out and narrowed a bit, allowing him to do so without bending over.

"Eh?" James said as he gestured at Glag.

"Glag!" Glag said as he matched the gesture, which caused him to point both arms at the tent to his left.

"Glag did I drop you from the sky like a meteor?" James followed up.

Glag's arm rose. "Glag!" He said, sounding excited.

"Did Amina only win the tournament because of a technicality and not because she beat either of us?"

"He-!" Amina began.

"GLAG!" Glag said, his arm stretching out even higher.

"And could Amina have beat either of us on her own?"

"Glag." The arm dropped to the ground quickly, then began pounding at it like it was a locked door.

Amina huffed. "You taught him yes and no. Adorable." She said. "Useful. But I have doubts."

"Like what?" James asked. "I've been working on this with him all night."

Amina put on a big smile.

"Glag!" She said with intentionally cheesy enthusiasm. "Is James just a scrumptious little smeplie tart who smells like feet?"

"What?" James asked in confusion.

"Glag!" Glag replied as he raised his hand up.

"Hey!" James exclaimed.

"And is the Vatrian Emperor the strongest person in ALLLLL The world? Even stronger than James?" She asked. Still overly cheerful to the point of ridiculousness.

Glags arm stretched upward again as he exclaimed. "Glag Glag!"

Then she put on a deeper, more serious tone, and glared at the rock creature just a little. "And should we feed you all kinds of tasty tasty stones that will make you grow big and strong any time you need to fight."

Glags hand dropped back to the ground immediately. "Glaaaaag."

But James had gotten the idea.

He glared daggers at his wife.

"Not cool." He said calmly.

"Glags are simple things." She said. "They sense emotions and heartbeats and other signs of what creatures around them are doing. I know that much. But there's never been any research proving them as terribly intelligent James. I thought maybe the medallion might reveal some hidden nuance to his.... Glag... speech. But... I think he's just Glag."

Glag looked up at James with what could only be described as his version of puppy dog eyes.

"Don't listen to her Glag. I know you're smarter than that." He said reassuringly.

"Glag?" The monster asked as James turned him away from the fire and back to where they'd been working together.

"It's okay buddy. I know like.... four and a half languages. We can teach you one." He said.

Amina just shook her head as she watched the two of them walk down to the river.

"You really do love him don't you?" Gorna asked from where she was resting on a blanket a few feet to Amina's left. "It's not just a political marriage or something?" She looked somewhat downcast as she asked the questions.

"I've been telling you that this entire trip." Amina said simply. "James isn't royalty. He's not even terribly high ranked in his world. And he only has the rank he does have because of his... unique position. I gained next to nothing, politically speaking, by marrying him."

"When you fought against Glag in the arena." Gorna said. "You two moved as one. Almost without even speaking. You've traveled together? Fought together?"

"More than most people who've only known each other for about a year and a half." She replied. "Hell. We've damn near died for each other at least half a dozen times."

Gorna's eyes widened. "And you've only known each other that long?"

"And for the first six months or so we viewed each other as potential enemies." She said with a light chuckle. "I punched him in the face the first time I met him."

Gorna looked down as she twiddled her fingers. "I want a marriage like that." She said softly.

Amina looked at her with pity that she was glad the centaur didn't look over and see.

"You're traveling with us Gorna." She said. "As long as you call us friend, or at least ally, we'll gladly fight at your side."

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"Easier if you did." The Centaur replied with a bit of a grin. "He can watch?"

"Nooooo." Amina said without even glancing at the dagger dancer.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/12817d6/wait_is_this_just_gate_340/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (339/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1264fj1/wait_is_this_just_gate_338/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: [*James in the last section.*](https://imgflip.com/i/7ghqwc) *And like 90% of you guys too.*

Also. It may not seem like a Vickers move. But you guys should know by now that if nothing else, he's self aware.

Enjoy.

\~

"How's the overload going?" Vickers asked as he and the two new Folk walked down the street toward the castle. They were moving slowly. Five was eager to run and climb. But Driscoll was still learning the new steering setup on his incredibly long body. "Let me know if it becomes too much."

"Have you been going through this the whole time since your shift?" Driscoll asked as he leaned on the walking stick he'd fashioned out of a garden hoe that had been at the house they'd used. "Everything smells so bad."

"Oh that's nothing." Vickers said. "You got lucky. I shifted closer to full were-form. Your senses are only going to get stronger as the days go by. I'm actually enjoying how toned down mine are right now."

"This is toned down?" Driscoll asked. "I can smell what you had for breakfast a week ago." He said, then pointed at a vendor walking down the street with a basket full of pastries. "And the fact that that guy doesn't wash his hands."

Vickers chuckled a bit as he handed a few coins to the vendor, then took three of the pastries. He tossed one up into the air. Five caught it from where she was hanging from a second floor window. She had adapted to her new body with remarkable speed. The pastry was gone in a single bite. Then she hung from her feet, sticking out from the building at almost a ninety degree angle, as she licked her hands clean.

Driscoll stared at the pastry with mild disgust. Vickers simply stared at Five in mild amazement. He had to admit just a tiny bit of jealousy at the incredible physical feat.

"I just said that that guy doesn't wash his hands." He said with a grimace. "I don't want that."

Vickers shrugged and popped his into his mouth. "More for me." He said. "It's not like we get diseases any more." His hand was still holding out the extra pastry. "And y'all aint bubble babies anymore."

Driscoll stared at it a bit longer. Then sighed as he reluctantly took it.

He took a bite and his eyes widened in surprise. Then he quickly scarfed down the last few bites.

"Was that raw meat?" He asked in disbelief. "That's so not safe ON TOP of the hand washing thing."

"Almost every vendor in this world has options for members of our kind." Vickers answered calmly. "Hers was Chock Full O' Nuts."

"And delicious." Five weighed in as she scampered down to keep up with the two significantly taller men, her bushy tail twitching rapidly. "I could have twenty of em."

"How do they bake it raw?" Driscoll asked curiously.

"According to Choi they freeze the meat with magic. Then its layered in caramelized sugar or solidified butter before its wrapped in the pastry itself." Vickers said. "Some places, namely the more successful ones, have precisely enchanted needles that they stick in the meat to keep it cold even when baking.

"Huh. That's.... actually clever." Driscoll admitted. "You know a lot about this stuff."

"For the same reason that you can probably list off pressures and temps for the deepest parts of different oceans. Or why any of us three can look at a wall and know exactly what kind of incoming fire it can protect us from." Vickers replied as he held an arm out to stop the two of them and let a carriage pass before they crossed the street. "Or why you can probably look at a pile of parts and machinery and know what to pull from what so you can do emergency repairs on those suits of yours."

"Necessary for survival in the field." Five said, beating Driscoll to the punch. "Useful intel if caught out on your own."

"Well." Vickers said with a tilt of his head. "Yes and no. I doubt that BAKING methods will ever be the difference between life and death for any of us. That's mostly just a cat being curious. But it is still useful."

The three of them walked in silence for a bit. People greeted them kindly, especially Driscoll and Five, both of whom were wearing the white robes that marked them as newly converted. When they passed close enough to members of the folk, they would frequently greet them with a hand on their shoulders as they passed. Driscoll returned the greetings somewhat awkwardly, whereas Five mostly flinched back until she realized what was happening. Instincts were difficult to grow accustomed to.

"Another thing that will be useful." Vickers said as they went around a corner. "Is also relearning gentleness."

"Gentleness?" Five asked. "Odd coming from the man that caved my chest in with fire and ice."

Vickers grinned a bit at the memory, causing her to shy away a bit before he covered his teeth again.

"How did that smile make you feel?" He asked.

She glared at him for a moment. "Cheap shot." She shot back.

"And yet it is something I have to be aware of now." Vickers lectured. "My smile is disconcerting even for normal people. For a prey-drive person like you, or for kids or something it's even worse." He flexed an arm and the leather of his jacket groaned from the strain. "I can be scary without even using my ACTUAL strength. I have to be careful with it."

Driscoll nodded understanding.

"Remember the egg test Five?" He asked.

"Uuuuugh. Took me weeks to pass that." She admitted.

"Same. And yet only a few weeks ago you could have juggled ten of them with your suit without even cracking any." Driscoll countered. "That's what the Chief is talking about."

"That some thing where you had to carry an egg without breaking it?" Vickers asked, legitimately curious. He still didn't know a lot about the Muck Marchers or their training.

"Through an obstacle course." Five answered. "Then once you passed that you had to do it again through a kill house."

Even without a multi-million dollar mechanical suit that worked based on nervous system input, Vickers couldn't imagine passing that test easily. Though he was tempted to try.

"Then yeah." He said instead of revealing his thoughts. "That's pretty much what I'm trying to say. First time I shook someone's hand after my change, well a normal person's hand anyways, I damn near crushed the poor guys bones. And to me it felt light enough to leave soda can undented."

The two of them already knew what he was talking about. They'd both already done small tests of their strength before they'd been released from the house. Driscoll had crushed a piece of thick walled pottery into dust with hardly any strain at all, and the singular cut he sustained had healed in a matter of moments. Five had pulled a coconut like fruit from the food supply she'd been given, and had cracked it open in seconds using only her hands and teeth. The nut meat inside had tasted oddly like a cross between walnut and some kind of light mango flavor. She wanted more of them.

"So." Vickers said, breaking them both out of their thoughts. "First things first." He stopped in front of a door and they looked up to see a sign that, while they couldn't understand it, clearly indicated some kind of tailor. "Let's get you guys some proper clothes ordered. Then let's get to the castle and see what you're actually capable of. On either side of the equation."

Then he opened the door for them and beckoned them in.

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"Alright guys." James said with a huge grin as he approached the campfire. "I got it."

He quickly stepped aside to reveal Glag.

"Hello Glag." Amina said sarcastically. "Glad you could join us."

"Glag." The rock monster replied.

"Watch this." James said, ignoring the jab. "Glag! Are you made of rock?"

"Glag!" He replied while raising his hand up above his head.

"Are you made of water?" James asked.

"Glag." This time he lowered his hand down almost to the ground. His arm stretched out and narrowed a bit, allowing him to do so without bending over.

"Eh?" James said as he gestured at Glag.

"Glag!" Glag said as he matched the gesture, which caused him to point both arms at the tent to his left.

"Glag did I drop you from the sky like a meteor?" James followed up.

Glag's arm rose. "Glag!" He said, sounding excited.

"Did Amina only win the tournament because of a technicality and not because she beat either of us?"

"He-!" Amina began.

"GLAG!" Glag said, his arm stretching out even higher.

"And could Amina have beat either of us on her own?"

"Glag." The arm dropped to the ground quickly, then began pounding at it like it was a locked door.

Amina huffed. "You taught him yes and no. Adorable." She said. "Useful. But I have doubts."

"Like what?" James asked. "I've been working on this with him all night."

Amina put on a big smile.

"Glag!" She said with intentionally cheesy enthusiasm. "Is James just a scrumptious little smeplie tart who smells like feet?"

"What?" James asked in confusion.

"Glag!" Glag replied as he raised his hand up.

"Hey!" James exclaimed.

"And is the Vatrian Emperor the strongest person in ALLLLL The world? Even stronger than James?" She asked. Still overly cheerful to the point of ridiculousness.

Glags arm stretched upward again as he exclaimed. "Glag Glag!"

Then she put on a deeper, more serious tone, and glared at the rock creature just a little. "And should we feed you all kinds of tasty tasty stones that will make you grow big and strong any time you need to fight."

Glags hand dropped back to the ground immediately. "Glaaaaag."

But James had gotten the idea.

He glared daggers at his wife.

"Not cool." He said calmly.

"Glags are simple things." She said. "They sense emotions and heartbeats and other signs of what creatures around them are doing. I know that much. But there's never been any research proving them as terribly

intelligent James. I thought maybe the medallion might reveal some hidden nuance to his.... Glag... speech. But... I think he's just Glag."

Glag looked up at James with what could only be described as his version of puppy dog eyes.

"Don't listen to her Glag. I know you're smarter than that." He said reassuringly.

"Glag?" The monster asked as James turned him away from the fire and back to where they'd been working together.

"It's okay buddy. I know like.... four and a half languages. We can teach you one." He said.

Amina just shook her head as she watched the two of them walk down to the river.

"You really do love him don't you?" Gorna asked from where she was resting on a blanket a few feet to Amina's left. "It's not just a political marriage or something?" She looked somewhat downcast as she asked the questions.

"I've been telling you that this entire trip." Amina said simply. "James isn't royalty. He's not even terribly high ranked in his world. And he only has the rank he does have because of his... unique position. I gained next to nothing, politically speaking, by marrying him."

"When you fought against Glag in the arena." Gorna said. "You two moved as one. Almost without even speaking. You've traveled together? Fought together?"

"More than most people who've only known each other for about a year and a half." She replied. "Hell. We've damn near died for each other at least half a dozen times."

Gorna's eyes widened. "And you've only known each other that long?"

"And for the first six months or so we viewed each other as potential enemies." She said with a light chuckle. "I punched him in the face the first time I met him."

Gorna looked down as she twiddled her fingers. "I want a marriage like that." She said softly.

Amina looked at her with pity that she was glad the centaur didn't look over and see.

"You're traveling with us Gorna." She said. "As long as you call us friend, or at least ally, we'll gladly fight at your side."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (338/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1256v2g/wait_is_this_just_gate_337/)

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"You were trying to win the tournament to get them to accept you?" James followed up.

Gorna looked over, a bit surprised at how well he'd read her intentions.

"Yes." She admitted.

The continued walking for a minute in silence.

"I'm not sorry that I beat you." Amina said after a few moments.

"Don't be." Gorna said. "The god of war desires combat. Survived defeat is simply a chance to grow in skill, and gain greater, more satisfying, victory in future battles."

Amina felt James stiffen. But she spoke before he could say anything.

"So long as the cost is low enough. Defeat grants more experience than victory." Amina agreed.

"Glag." Glag weighed in.

"Well said Glag." James remarked.

"Glag glag." Glag replied.

"By the way." Gorna said. "Why is that thing following you?"

"No idea." James admitted. "But I'm not looking to fight him about it."

"Glag." Glag said.

And the four of them continued down the road.

\------------------------

Samantha yawned as the van rumbled over the gravel road out of the recreational area.

"Huh." Fletcher said as he looked back from the passenger seat. "Looks like we finally found you guys' limits. Never seen any of you guys exhausted before."

^("Could see it a bit more often if you wanted.") She said softly.

"What?" He asked as he turned back, a look of confusion on his face.

"Nothing." She replied. She always got too candid when she was tired. "Just that it was the squirrel's fault."

"Heh. Yeah" He said in response. "You guys chased that thing for like, half an hour."

She laughed a bit. "At least until the food was done."

Fletcher turned a bit and looked back at the other werewolves. If any of them were still awake, he couldn't tell. The youngest one was curled into the crook of Mrs. Ramirez's shoulder. The older woman had taken the roll of the newly orphaned child's makeshift mother.

"They look up to you you know?" He asked quietly. He pointed at the rest of the small group. "Not just them either. But the rest too."

"Yeah right." She said as she looked out the window, her head vibrating against the glass.

"I'm serious." He said. "They listen to you." He pointed back again. "You didn't see the looks on their faces when we opened the cooler with all the meat in it. They were ready to rip that burger meat to shreds. And Esteves's arm would've come out unscathed if they had.'" He nodded at her. "You stopped them with nothing but words and a bit of a growl."

She thought back to it. Had that been how it had looked? To her it had just been her reminding them to act like people and not like the animals that that supposed "God" had tried to make them.

"No...." She said, shaking her head. "That was just.... no."

"Cliche or not." He said. "You're kinda the leader of.... well... the pack."

She looked away, her eyes darting around a bit as she thought about that for a moment.

"Don't want to be the pack leader." She said. "Didn't even want to be an NCO. Just wanted to get my criminology and then go CID."

"Didn't wanna be a werewolf either." He said.

"Don't remind me." She shot back.

Dr. Esteves stayed quiet in the drivers seat. Dr. Munro had warned him that Jenkins had a bit of a crush on the Lawyer.

"I didn't want to be a lawyer." He said. She looked over at him in surprise, her head tilting like it did now."Or live in Dakota. But... eh.... you make do."

"Really?" She asked curiously. "What did you want to do?"

He let out a chuckle. "I wanted to be a guitarist." He admitted. "Turns out I'm tone deaf. Aaaaaaand can't keep a beat to save my soul."

"And that..... made you a lawyer?" She asked.

"Eh... more like the tail end of a long series of dominoes." He said. "And it's not like it compares to what you guys are going through." Then he shrugged. "Plus. Like a lot of guys stories. It kinda involves a girl."

"Ah." She said. "Makes sense."

They rode in silence for a while.

"You're handling it well." He said after a while.

She looked over at him curiously.

"The whole... wolf thing." He explained. "I can't imagine what it's like. Losing everything. Even your own instincts."

She thought for a while. "Wasn't exactly fun she agreed. But.... now that I've been this way for a while. There are some upsides." She confessed.

"Yeah?" He wondered. "Like what? Bench pressing a pickup truck is pretty sweet I guess."

"That's one." She agreed. Then she looked back at the others. "But... well, I don't know about the whole LEADER thing... But... I think I might've been alone before... You know? Without realizing it. It's nice not to be. Dr. Munro ACTUALLY cares about me."

"She's like that." He said. "She got in trouble a few years back before all this for... well, that's her story to tell. But, lets just say that she'll definitely throw down to take care of her patients."

"Plus them." She said with a wave at the other wolves. "I'm glad you guys let us meet each other. It's nice not to be alone in all of this."

"Would you two just make out already?" One of the ones in the back asked with a slight raise of their head. They pointed at their ears. "Super hearing remember? Trying to sleep."

"True." Another one slurred through their exhaustion.

If it hadn't been for her fur, Samantha would have blushed. Fletcher just looked straight ahead, eyes wide.

Dr. Esteves tried not to chuckle, and ALMOST, succeeded.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (338/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1256rv4/wait_is_this_just_gate_337/) /
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"I'm not sorry that I beat you." Amina said after a few moments.

"Don't be." Gorna said. "The god of war desires combat. Survived defeat is simply a chance to grow in skill, and gain greater, more satisfying, victory in future battles."

Amina felt James stiffen. But she spoke before he could say anything.

"So long as the cost is low enough. Defeat grants more experience than victory." Amina agreed.

"Glag." Glag weighed in.

"Well said Glag." James remarked.

"Glag glag." Glag replied.

"By the way." Gorna said. "Why is that thing following you?"

"No idea." James admitted. "But I'm not looking to fight him about it."

"Glag." Glag said.

And the four of them continued down the road.

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Samantha yawned as the van rumbled over the gravel road out of the recreational area.

"Huh." Fletcher said as he looked back from the passenger seat. "Looks like we finally found you guys' limits. Never seen any of you guys exhausted before."

^("Could see it a bit more often if you wanted.") She said softly.

"What?" He asked as he turned back, a look of confusion on his face.

"Nothing." She replied. She always got too candid when she was tired. "Just that it was the squirrel's fault."

"Heh. Yeah" He said in response. "You guys chased that thing for like, half an hour."

She laughed a bit. "At least until the food was done."

Fletcher turned a bit and looked back at the other werewolves. If any of them were still awake, he couldn't tell. The youngest one was curled into the crook of Mrs. Ramirez's shoulder. The older woman had taken the roll of the newly orphaned child's makeshift mother.

"They look up to you you know?" He asked quietly. He pointed at the rest of the small group. "Not just them either. But the rest too."

"Yeah right." She said as she looked out the window, her head vibrating against the glass.

"I'm serious." He said. "They listen to you." He pointed back again. "You didn't see the looks on their faces when we opened the cooler with all the meat in it. They were ready to rip that burger meat to shreds. And Esteves's arm wouldn't've come out unscathed if they had.'" He nodded at her. "You stopped them with nothing but words and a bit of a growl."

She thought back to it. Had that been how it had looked? To her it had just been her reminding them to act like people and not like the animals that that supposed "God" had tried to make them.

"No...." She said, shaking her head. "That was just.... no."

"Cliche or not." He said. "You're kinda the leader of.... well... the pack."

She looked away, her eyes darting around a bit as she thought about that for a moment.

"Don't want to be the pack leader." She said. "Didn't even want to be an NCO. Just wanted to get my criminology and then go CID."

"Didn't wanna be a werewolf either." He said.

"Don't remind me." She shot back.

Dr. Esteves stayed quiet in the drivers seat. Dr. Munro had warned him that Jenkins had a bit of a crush on the Lawyer.

"I didn't want to be a lawyer." He said. She looked over at him in surprise, her head tilting like it did now."Or live in Dakota. But... eh.... you make do."

"Really?" She asked curiously. "What did you want to do?"

He let out a chuckle. "I wanted to be a guitarist." He admitted. "Turns out I'm tone deaf. Aaaaaaand can't keep a beat to save my soul."

"And that..... made you a lawyer?" She asked.

"Eh... more like the tail end of a long series of dominoes." He said. "And it's not like it compares to what you guys are going through." Then he shrugged. "Plus. Like a lot of guys stories. It kinda involves a girl."

"Ah." She said. "Makes sense."

They rode in silence for a while.

"You're handling it well." He said after a while.

She looked over at him curiously.

"The whole... wolf thing." He explained. "I can't imagine what it's like. Losing everything. Even your own instincts."

She thought for a while. "Wasn't exactly fun" She agreed. "But.... now that I've been this way for a while. There are some upsides." She confessed.

"Yeah?" He wondered. "Like what? Bench pressing a pickup truck is pretty sweet I guess."

"That's one." She agreed. Then she looked back at the others. "But... well, I don't know about the whole LEADER thing... But... I think I might've been alone before... You know? Without realizing it. It's nice not to be. Dr. Munro ACTUALLY cares about me."

"She's like that." He said. "She got in trouble a few years back before all this for... well, that's her story to tell. But, lets just say that she'll definitely throw down to take care of her patients."

"Plus them." She said with a wave at the other wolves. "I'm glad you guys let us meet each other. It's nice not to be alone in all of this."

"Would you two just make out already?" One of the ones in the back asked with a slight raise of their head. They pointed at their ears. "Super hearing remember? Trying to sleep."

"True." Another one slurred through their exhaustion.

If it hadn't been for her fur, Samantha would have blushed. Fletcher just looked straight ahead, eyes wide.

Dr. Esteves tried not to chuckle, and ALMOST, succeeded.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1271ves/wait_is_this_just_gate_339/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (337/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1241y8v/wait_is_this_just_gate_336/)

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She felt the energy move through her body. No matter what she did. No matter what she pulled it from. Whether the warmth of the air, the motion of the wind outside, the movement of all the living bodies in the castle, or even the light of the sun outside her windows, it always did the same new thing.

The healers explanation of it made sense. But it still threw off her ability to control the flow of the energy within herself. She was effectively being forced to remap the flow of magic as it moved through her. And as her unborn child drew some of it into itself.

Luckily there HADN'T been any changes to that flow. Not even when she drew in more.

It just made focusing on her casts almost impossible. Made the use of the energy that managed to get past the child difficult. Difficult to route. Difficult to obtain enough to be useful. She only hoped it would go back to normal once she finally managed to give birth.

Come on little one. She thought pleadingly. *Let me have enough to use.*

She drew in more, pulling from several of the power sources she'd gathered in her lab. The large shard of elemental obsidian she'd poured energy into for weeks at a time, pouring a trickle into it each time she walked past it. So often that she'd practically done it without thinking before the shard had lit up red, marking it as being almost at capacity. The heart of a great sea serpent that had been slain by an enchanted harpoon and still beat within the jar it was stored in. She used it for any enchantment that needed a cooling effect, as she had never been good at ice magic. She pulled from one of the massive "Car Batteries" that she'd managed to salvage from a MIFFY that had been destroyed in the desert. That energy had always made her senses tingle whenever she drew it in, and it did now.

She felt all of that energy draw in, route down to her abdomen even if it was already in the pointing hand to begin with, then back to the hand.

COME ON!

A small, green spark emitted from the pointed finger.

DO IT!

Another spark, this one leaping in an arc to her cocked thumb.

"COME ON YOU BITCH!" She said to herself. "SHOOT A FUCKING BOLT!"

She focused everything on that finger, and felt the energy surge through her like a wave.

A wave that started in her midsection.

There was a noise so loud and so all encompassing that it was hard to tell what it was.

A torrent of lightning bolts, bluish-green like they had always been, but remarkably bright compared to their former inky darkness, sprayed from her pointing finger tip. They spread out in a massive cone so dense that it was almost a solid object.

And... they pushed her back.

Even the largest firearm she'd made, which James had quickly told her to tone down and refine with several upgrade suggestions, hadn't kicked like this spell did. She braced her arm with the other, non-casting, hand and felt herself being pushed across the lab until she slammed into one of her desks. Then the recoil continued pushing, forcing her to bend over backwards as she struggled to control where she was pointing.

"What the fu-" She tried to ask.

Then it stopped. It was as if someone had simply... shut it off. One second she had been struggling to even stay standing and aiming at the dummy from the force of the mass of death bolt energy she'd been shooting forward in a solid beam. Then her hand was simply pointing, with nothing coming out of it.

And the energy in her body was back to a normal, passive level.

She'd been trying to get it to that level. But something inside her had been feeding it in a seemingly nonstop upward charge. Then the upward charge had just... cut off.

She was standing, still bent backwards over the desk, wondering what had just happened, and trying to read the magical energy still lingering in the air from the spell.

Then she noticed how green the light in the room seemed.

She looked down from the ceiling to where the dummy was.

And she saw a veritable rain forest of plant life, illuminated by the small window nearby.

"What?" She asked nobody, since nobody was there.

The dummy, the wall behind the dummy, a little bit of the ceiling, and one hanging lantern that was nearby, were all coated in plant life. Lichens, vines, flowers, branches, and weeds of all kind and color were growing from them as if they had always been there. Even the glass of the window had some grass growing sideways out of it.

She looked down at her finger curiously, then tried to look up at her new antlers. Naturally they remained out of view, so she reached up and touched them.

And found that they were warm to the touch. In fact, they were almost hot.

"Oooooh." She said as she realized one of the problems with her magical abilities. "That's a bit of a problem."

Then she looked down at her belly and placed a hand on it.

"And don't think I didn't notice your part in that." She said. "We're gonna have to talk about that." She tilted her head a bit. "Whenever... you are capable of talking."

Then she began running out of her lab and towards Marcos's tower.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1264gv5/wait_is_this_just_gate_338/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (337/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1241tf3/wait_is_this_just_gate_336/) /
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Luckily there HADN'T been any changes to that flow. Not even when she drew in more.

It just made focusing on her casts almost impossible. Made the use of the energy that managed to get past the child difficult. Difficult to route. Difficult to obtain enough to be useful. She only hoped it would go back to normal once she finally managed to give birth.

Come on little one. She thought pleadingly. *Let me have enough to use.*

She drew in more, pulling from several of the power sources she'd gathered in her lab. The large shard of elemental obsidian she'd poured energy into for weeks at a time, pouring a trickle into it each time she walked past it. So often that she'd practically done it without thinking before the shard had lit up red, marking it as being almost at capacity. The heart of a great sea serpent that had been slain by an enchanted harpoon and still beat within the jar it was stored in. She used it for any enchantment that needed a cooling effect, as she had never been good at ice magic. She pulled from one of the massive "Car Batteries" that she'd managed to salvage from a MIFFY that had been destroyed in the desert. That energy had always made her senses tingle whenever she drew it in, and it did now.

She felt all of that energy draw in, route down to her abdomen even if it was already in the pointing hand to begin with, then back to the hand.

COME ON!

A small, green spark emitted from the pointed finger.

DO IT!

Another spark, this one leaping in an arc to her cocked thumb.

"COME ON YOU BITCH!" She said to herself. "SHOOT A FUCKING BOLT!"

She focused everything on that finger, and felt the energy surge through her like a wave.

A wave that started in her midsection.

There was a noise so loud and so all encompassing that it was hard to tell what it was.

A torrent of lightning bolts, bluish-green like they had always been, but remarkably bright compared to their former inky darkness, sprayed from her pointing finger tip. They spread out in a massive cone so dense that it was almost a solid object.

And... they pushed her back.

Even the largest firearm she'd made, which James had quickly told her to tone down and refine with several upgrade suggestions, hadn't kicked like this spell did. She braced her arm with the other, non-casting, hand and felt herself being pushed across the lab until she slammed into one of her desks. Then the recoil continued pushing, forcing her to bend over backwards as she struggled to control where she was pointing.

"What the fu-" She tried to ask.

Then it stopped. It was as if someone had simply... shut it off. One second she had been struggling to even stay standing and aiming at the dummy from the force of the mass of death bolt energy she'd been shooting forward in a solid beam. Then her hand was simply pointing, with nothing coming out of it.

And the energy in her body was back to a normal, passive level.

She'd been trying to get it to that level. But something inside her had been feeding it in a seemingly nonstop upward charge. Then the upward charge had just... cut off.

She was standing, still bent backwards over the desk, wondering what had just happened, and trying to read the magical energy still lingering in the air from the spell.

Then she noticed how green the light in the room seemed.

She looked down from the ceiling to where the dummy was.

And she saw a veritable rain forest of plant life, illuminated by the small window nearby.

"What?" She asked nobody, since nobody was there.

The dummy, the wall behind the dummy, a little bit of the ceiling, and one hanging lantern that was nearby, were all coated in plant life. Lichens, vines, flowers, branches, and weeds of all kind and color were growing from them as if they had always been there. Even the glass of the window had some grass growing sideways out of it.

She looked down at her finger curiously, then tried to look up at her new antlers. Naturally they remained out of view, so she reached up and touched them.

And found that they were warm to the touch. In fact, they were almost hot.

"Oooooh." She said as she realized one of the problems with her magical abilities. "That's a bit of a problem."

Then she looked down at her belly and placed a hand on it.

"And don't think I didn't notice your part in that." She said. "We're gonna have to talk about that." She tilted her head a bit. "Whenever... you are capable of talking."

Then she began running out of her lab and towards Marcos's tower.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1264fj1/wait_is_this_just_gate_338/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (336/?)

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"Glag!" Glag exclaimed back.

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To make matters even funnier, Gorna the centaur was attempting to help her "mistress".

And she was not doing well.

"Oh! Hon, Gorna's got your back!" He said, hiding a smirk, as he pointed at the centaur with his ale hand. "Maybe this great challenge will be enough to count as having been served ably by her! Just... Just a thought." He sipped. "Besides I think I'm too drunk to catch him!" He fibbed as a few of the deckhands nearby laughed. "Keep trying though. I'm sure he'll tire soon."

As if on cue Glag rolled under and between Gorna's front and rear legs. Amina slammed into the centaur face first and was almost clothes-lined in the process.

"My lady!" Gorna exclaimed as she rushed to move out of the way AND help Amina up.

Amina ignored her and rolled under her then began looking for Glag.

"Over there Princess!" One of the deckhands said with a nod.

"Glag!" Glag exclaimed, and James thought he heard a hint of joy in the grating, rumbling voice. He was almost over near Tanier, having ascended the stairs to the next deck up in a leap.

"Dammit!" Amina hissed as she ran after him.

James just laughed and went back to reading the book. He had no intention of actually LEARNING Vatrian, but he figured a few key phrases might be useful down the road.

"GLAAAG!"Glag yelled as he heard a crash from somewhere behind Tanier and the ship's wheel.

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Driscoll woke up to a sensation that was, at least partly, familiar. What wasn't familiar was the series of sensations accompanying it.

He was floating.

But he was also wet.

And he could smell the water and the..... flowers(?)... that were in it. And.... candles.

His suit could float just fine if it needed to. Reinforced balloons could be inflated or deflated as needed to help him get to the surface of the ocean if he needed to. They were primarily for recovery purposes. But many of his kind used them to assist with vertical traversal when in the deep ocean as well.

But if he was in his suit than how could he be wet? And how could he smell anything other than the cleaning moisturizer that their suit applied to their skin to keep it from drying out? Or the rubber seals and circuitry as they warmed up during times of action?

And how could he feel his.

MY HANDS AND LEGS!?!?!

He lurched up using only his back and the momentum from rocking his head, which temporarily dunked it back under the water.

"Woah!" A familiar, and much too loud, voice said as a hand clamped down on his collarbone. "Relax!"

By reflex Driscoll's hands clasped onto the large, clawed, furred, hand and attempted to dislodge it using the same nerve commands that he would have used in the suit. The result was that his hands began to squeeze, attempting to crush the arm of his would be assailant the way he would have in the suit. The hand holding him was massive, and even placed just above his sternum it almost wrapped around his neck.

There was a slight pop from the massive animal's arm.

"Ow." The familiar voice said calmly. Then a second, equally massive, hand grabbed his left hand. "Relax sardine."

And as the hand gripped his and slowly, but with incredible gentleness, pulled his hand away. Driscoll FELT the fur on the hands.

As if flipping a switch in his mind he realized he could also FEEL the one he'd been trying to get off of him too.

"What?" He asked. "What's happening?"

He looked around and realized that he was in a bath of some kind, though the tub was massive, inside a house.

And... he had hands.

They weren't.... Well, they weren't his hands. Not really. They couldn't be. He'd had his hands amputated nearly fifteen years ago due to chemical burns and necrosis.

Besides, these hands were massive, and covered in red fur that faded to black as it neared his... claws? They reminded him of images he'd seen of professional basketball players pre-war.

"Driscoll?" The voice asked. Driscoll looked at it and saw the feline featured face of Chief Vickers. "Relax." He said. "Lie back down."

"Vickers?" He asked. "It.... It worked?" He asked as he held his new hand up in front of his face and moved it. It actually moved when he told it to. And it had none of the micro-lag that they'd had to train to overcome when they'd first had their interfaces mapped into their suits.

Then he heard a splash and realized that he was feeling....

His head snapped down past Vickers' arm and saw legs. Actually, honest to god, legs.

Like the hands they were long. Incredibly long. Awkwardly, lankily, long actually. The joints had been rearranged in a way that was like a dogs or cats, and they ended in paws. They also had the same red-to-black fade as his hands, though the toes had white fur around the ends.

But when he told his right foot to kick it did, sending a small splash of water over the edge of the tub.

He felt a different wetness then, as his eyes welled up.

He had arms.

He had legs.

For the first time since he'd turned thirteen. Since he'd watched as a cloud of deadly gas and debris and other types of fallout had washed

over the middle school parking lot his mom had just dropped him off at. He had a body all of his own. A working body.

"I.... I lived?" He asked. "It worked?"

"Yeah." Vickers said as he gently lowered the, now former, muck marcher back into the water gently and let him float there. "Yeah. You're good. Just gotta recover a bit."

He hadn't expected to survive the ordeal. Not after Vickers and the other two were-folk had explained what would happen, and how low his odds were. He'd expected his body to be overcome by the transformation and give up, or for his mind to break. On the latter, he had almost been proven right. He remembered the pain, as flesh began to tear and bones had begun to break. As implants used to keep him alive had been expelled violently, and his Can had been ejected like a champagne cork. He remembered the smell and remembered how, as he had thrashed about, he had placed his hands in something that was supposed to be inside it.

He remembered using lungs that could barely breath on their own to scream a wail of death that any metal front man would have died to have in their vocal arsenal.

Then he'd passed out.

And now in a warm tub full of fragrant water, who knew how many hours or days later, he was not only alive. He was whole again.

He was, for all intents and purposes, reborn.

Then he remembered that he hadn't undergone the process alone.

He reached up, still marveling at the concept of having a hand that he could FEEL, and tried to grab Vickers' sleeve. He miscalculated and ended up almost pushing the SEAL off of the edge of the tub. But he braced himself in time and looked down at Driscoll curiously.

"Five?" Driscoll asked. "Is she?..." He trailed off.

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"That is a LONG fuckin neck. Holy shit." The large were-jaguar said in surprise. Then he tossed the slice of meat up a bit, as if to a pet dog. Driscoll eagerly snapped it from the air with his teeth. "Well that's new nightmare fuel." He said softly to himself as he reached for more.

Driscoll gripped the steak with both hands and tore at it greedily, his teeth sinking in with ease and taking small chunks out with each bite.

That was when, as he slid another piece in with his new hands, he noticed just how pointed his teeth were. For that matter, as his hand explored his face, he noticed that he had a snout now. And pointed ears that were even more severe than those on Vickers' head.

Then he felt something his mind couldn't quite... understand.

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He reached behind himself and grabbed at his back and felt a tentacle.

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"Relax!" Vickers said in a commanding tone. "it's just your tail!"

Driscoll managed to get a hold of the thing at almost the exact same moment Vickers made the announcement.

"I have a tail!?!" He asked incredulously.

"You're a damn fox!" Vickers shot back. "Of course you have a tail. I have a damn tail."

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11zxsxq/wait_is_this_just_gate_335/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (335/?)

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Writer's note: Tuuurn and face the strange! Cha-Cha-Changes!

Enjoy.

\~

James trudged as he and Amina walked back to the airship.

Partly because they had, politely yet definitively, been asked to leave Vatria.

Partly because he'd almost single handedly ended the tournament but was NOT the champion of it.

And partly because he and Amina had two tag-alongs following them.

Amina, despite everything else was beaming with pride and a smile as she sat on top of Steve as James guided him through the streets of the capital towards the end of the palace grounds where her sister and the ambassador had docked the air ship. Around her neck was a loosely draped neck-piece made of a combinations of emeralds and sapphires, wrought in a bright silver. It was the tournament's version of a laurel or wreath. She also had a hefty bag of gold and silver stored in her bottomless bag now. Not that she was hurting for money.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (335/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Tuuurn and face the strange! Cha-Cha-Changes!

Enjoy.

\~

James trudged as he and Amina walked back to the airship.

Partly because they had, politely yet definitively, been asked to leave Vatria.

Partly because he'd almost single handedly ended the tournament but was NOT the champion of it.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (334/?)

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Samantha stepped out of the van hesitantly. Behind her three of the other werewolves from the hospital followed suit. It was near the new moon, so their bodies were as close to human as they could be. They still had slight snouts, and their ears were still higher than they would normally be, and mildly pointed. Their legs were still jointed like that of a wolf, but less noticeably.

Still, they wore the baggy, form concealing, sweatpants and hoodies that the hospital had supplied them with.

She stretched her legs and arms as far as they would go. Her joints didn't crackle or pop like they'd used to. But they'd driven for nearly two hours before arriving here, at a small lake that the government had cordoned off for their private use today. Unlike the others present, her military training made her acutely aware that there were likely drones somewhere keeping an eye on them in case they ran or something.

Her thoughts were quickly pushed aside as the first deep breath of fresh air, wild grass and woods, and lake water rode the wind into her nose. Even in her mostly human form her sense of smell was significantly better than normal.

Then she heard deep breaths being taken very close by. She opened her eyes and was surprised to see the other three standing beside, and a little behind, her also taking in deep scents with closed eyes like she just had.

She heard a rustling of plastic and paper and looked over to the van. The hospital lawyer, Mr. Richard Fletcher, and one of the doctors of one of the other werewolves present, a Dr. Esteves, were pulling a cooler and some supplies out of the back of the van. By habit, she made her way over to help.

Then she smelled something that made her senses go wild with hunger. It was apparent from the sudden shifting of feet behind her that the others had smelled it too.

"Ah dammit." Dr. Esteves said as he shook pinkish juices off of his sleeve. "Damn burger bag must've had a hole in it."

"Ms. Jenkins?" Fletcher asked curiously. "You okay? Are.... any of you okay?"

Samantha shook her head a bit. "Sorry." She said somewhat bashfully. "Just... a lot of smells out here. That raw beef smells.... good."

Through the open doors of the van she saw the doctor's eyes widen as he realized that he was covered in something the wolves wanted.

"We're good." She said. Then she looked back as one of the other three stepped up to almost even with her. "WE'RE.... GOOD." She said slowly but firmly, directing it at the younger wolf.

He was just a high schooler who'd been unfortunate enough to be in Sturgis on a roadtrip with his parents and younger sister when the incident had occurred. He was an orphan now.

"Yeah." The young man, Bradley, said as he flicked his nose a few times. "Sorry."

"It's all good." Fletcher said with only a mild hint of uncertainty. "Doc'll clean his hands off in a bit. And we'll make sure to keep some of the burgers a bit rare for you guys. It'll be a bit though. Why don't you guys roam a bit? Just remember the rules."

Then something unexpected occurred.

Something made one of the branches of a nearby tree move as it chattered noisily. Even with their reduced size and abilities, Samantha's ears, and all the ears of the other werewolves, instinctively attempted to turn to listen. Their heads snapped in that direction in unison that would have made military Honor Guard members jealous.

The squirrel chattered at them noisily from its branch as it picked at something, and something inside her told her that it was angry at having intruders on its territory.

That didn't matter to any of them as they quickly, quietly, and wordlessly began fanning out and slowly approached the tree it was in.

"Thaaaaat's not terrifying at all." Dr. Esteves said quietly.

Fletcher looked over his shoulder at the doctor. "You should probably hurry up about washing your hands." He said seriously.

Then he pulled out his phone and texted Dr. Munro.

>You were right. She's the leader of the pack.

\---------------------------

James groaned as hauled the chain-bound Glag into the sky. Jets of magically powered energy blasting from the bottoms of his feet as he channeled more and more power from the surrounding into his body and out of their soles.

Below him, Glag's semi-amorphous sandstone form writhed and wriggled, new limbs sprouting, seemingly at random as they struggled with the enchanted chain and the three blades pinning them onto him. But James had intentionally worked the chain so that in it's numerous loops around the elemental combatant it had formed simple knots. Additionally, while Glag eventually managed to loose Amina's dagger, it struggled with her sword. Curiously it seemed unaware that James's enchanted sword was even there.

Higher and higher they went. James looked back every few seconds to check on Glag and make sure that he hadn't managed to loose himself yet. Each time the arena got smaller, and smaller, and smaller. Eventually even the imperial palace began to look small, and it was nearly a mile across in either direction.

"Okay." He said with a grunt as he struggled to slow, then hover. "I think that's high enough." He looked down at the stone creature struggling below. It had managed to get a few lengths of chain loose, and was now hanging some twenty feet below instead of the ten or so that it had been when James had lifted off. But he still had at least another fifty feet of chain left before he was free, and James's sword was still embedded deeply into its side.

"GLAAAAG!" It bellowed at him angrily, its two large black eyes focused on him.

"Yeah glag you to bud." He shot back. "Wanna be back with your friends again?" He asked.

"GLAG?"

"Cool." James said as he blasted down past Glag, to the end of the chain, then under and back up. Glag wobbled a bit from the sudden redirection, and James used the shift in weight to begin swinging him back and forth, with each swing growing in angle and speed.

It took a minute or so, but eventually James was able to get the bundle of rock monster swinging enough that he was able to use his strength to swing him into a loop over him.

"Glaaaaaaa------aaaaaa**GGG!"** The confused thing yelled as it began to loop around James faster and faster. Parts of it began to crack and flake off as it was pressed into the magical chain by centrifugal gravity.

"DING!" James exclaimed loudly as he got the spin going about as fast as his equilibrium could handle. "EXPRESS ELEVATOR GOING DOWN! FIRST FLOOR! APPLIANCES! FURNITURE! MASSIVE CHUNKS OF BROKEN BOULDER!"

And as Glag attempted to speak his singular phrase once more in confusion, James released him like an old fashioned slingshot straight down.

"GLAAAAAAAAAAAAA^(AAAAAAAAgggggg!")

James paused for a second as he watched the elemental hurtle toward the ground. He took just a moment to get his stomach back in place.

"Oh that was a lot of spinning." He said to himself. Then he looked down. "Should probably make sure I aimed that right.

He flipped himself over with a quick burst from his feet.

BOOM!

And he began chasing the new asteroid known as Glag.

\----------

Amina craned her head up and back as she watched the sky. She wasn't the only one. Not even close.

She was effecctively the only combatant left in the arena at this point, Raend having quickly been retrieved by several of the arena staff and dragged back into the tunnels leading out so he could be attended by healers.

Glag's place on the announcers stand now had two flags in it as a result of the penalty his injury to the hammer wielding mercenary. Even now Amina hefted the massive, enchanted, hammer in her hands. She swung it up and down lazily so that it would strike the ground near her feet, keeping its enchantment active by extending it with each strike. She wanted it ready in case this didn't work against the Glag.

Something glinted in the sky above, and a faint noise could be heard coming from it.

"It's them!" Someone in the crowd exclaimed. She glanced that way and saw a were-eagle staring up at the object. Their eyes were much stronger than anyone else's, and sure enough a few others like them began sounding off with confirming exclamations.

Obviously. She thought. *Who or what else would it be?*

James wasn't going to be happy about the results of the impending attack. The announcer had made the statement of it only a few seconds after James and the trailing Glag had lifted off into the sky.

But at least she'd be champion. Assuming she could defeat the Glag in the few moments before it recovered. And that was assuming it COULD recover from this.

^("AAAAAAAAAA)AAAAAAAAA**GGGG!!!"** They all heard from above.

From where he was standing in his viewing box, the Emperor began to sign furiously to the arena mages. His translator gave the command in a yell.

"GET THE ARENA SHIELDS UP NOW!" She demanded in a tone that Amina hadn't heard her use the day before.

Amina's eyes went wide as she saw how fast the Glag was hurtling towards the ground. Then she saw the twin Jets of James's flying magic burning out from behind it and realized that he was PUSHING THE DAMN THING!

"JAMES YOU UTTER BAS-" She yelled to nobody in particular before dashing behind one of the few remaining pillars, ducking down behind her shield, and raising a magical shield on top of that, though she'd never been terribly good at conjuring them.

Amina had felt her share of insanely overpowered impacts in her life. She'd been hit in combat by creatures that could crush a man with a single blow, and been saved only by skill, luck, and armor.

She'd been on the receiving end of attacks by siege weapons of all kinds, including trebuchets. Though she'd only been NEAR the landing spot for the latter, and only so that she and a few of her fellow sergeants at the time could be familiar with what an impact from one of them was like in case they ever needed to maintain their bearing during a siege.

Then of course there had been the battles of Jadesport and, more directly, the battle in the desert, where she'd been yards away from the impact point of the insanely devastating earth weapons known as thermobarics.

Somehow, none of them compared to the sheer violence and destructive power that her husband caused when he, in the last hundred feet or so of his descent, released Glag to unleash havoc upon the arena below.

At first there was no noise save the confused and seemingly terrified, if such a thing were possible, cry of Glag as he yelled "GLAG!?!?!" one last time.

Then there was a cracking, rumbling, echoing thunder.

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To the arena and Glag.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11zxv7u/wait_is_this_just_gate_335/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (334/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11xwse8/wait_is_this_just_gate_333/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Jenkins. Cool.

Also, once a lower enlisted, always a lower enlisted. Aint nothin they can't fuck up.

Enjoy.

\~

Samantha stepped out of the van hesitantly. Behind her three of the other werewolves from the hospital followed suit. It was near the new moon, so their bodies were as close to human as they could be. They still had slight snouts, and their ears were still higher than they would normally be, and mildly pointed. Their legs were still jointed like that of a wolf, but less noticeably.

Still, they wore the baggy, form concealing, sweatpants and hoodies that the hospital had supplied them with.

She stretched her legs and arms as far as they would go. Her joints didn't crackle or pop like they'd used to. But they'd driven for nearly two hours before arriving here, at a small lake that the government had cordoned off for their private use today. Unlike the others present, her military training made her acutely aware that there were likely drones somewhere keeping an eye on them in case they ran or something.

Her thoughts were quickly pushed aside as the first deep breath of fresh air, wild grass and woods, and lake water rode the wind into her nose. Even in her mostly human form her sense of smell was significantly better than normal.

Then she heard deep breaths being taken very close by. She opened her eyes and was surprised to see the other three standing beside, and a little behind, her also taking in deep scents with closed eyes like she just had.

She heard a rustling of plastic and paper and looked over to the van. The hospital lawyer, Mr. Richard Fletcher, and one of the doctors of one of

the other werewolves present, a Dr. Esteves, were pulling a cooler and some supplies out of the back of the van. By habit, she made her way over to help.

Then she smelled something that made her senses go wild with hunger. It was apparent from the sudden shifting of feet behind her that the others had smelled it too.

"Ah dammit." Dr. Esteves said as he shook pinkish juices off of his sleeve. "Damn burger bag must've had a hole in it."

"Ms. Jenkins?" Fletcher asked curiously. "You okay? Are.... any of you okay?"

Samantha shook her head a bit. "Sorry." She said somewhat bashfully. "Just... a lot of smells out here. That raw beef smells.... good."

Through the open doors of the van she saw the doctor's eyes widen as he realized that he was covered in something the wolves wanted.

"We're good." She said. Then she looked back as one of the other three stepped up to almost even with her. "WE'RE.... GOOD." She said slowly but firmly, directing it at the younger wolf.

He was just a high schooler who'd been unfortunate enough to be in Sturgis on a roadtrip with his parents and younger sister when the incident had occurred. He was an orphan now.

"Yeah." The young man, Bradley, said as he flicked his nose a few times. "Sorry."

"It's all good." Fletcher said with only a mild hint of uncertainty. "Doc'll clean his hands off in a bit. And we'll make sure to keep some of the burgers a bit rare for you guys. It'll be a bit though. Why don't you guys roam a bit? Just remember the rules."

Then something unexpected occurred.

Something made one of the branches of a nearby tree move as it chattered noisily. Even with their reduced size and abilities, Samantha's ears, and all the ears of the other werewolves, instinctively attempted to turn to listen. Their heads snapped in that direction in unison that would have made military Honor Guard members jealous.

The squirrel chattered at them noisily from its branch as it picked at something, and something inside her told her that it was angry at having intruders on its territory.

That didn't matter to any of them as they quickly, quietly, and wordlessly began fanning out and slowly approached the tree it was in.

"Thaaaaat's not terrifying at all." Dr. Esteves said quietly.

Fletcher looked over his shoulder at the doctor. "You should probably hurry up about washing your hands." He said seriously.

Then he pulled out his phone and texted Dr. Munro.

>You were right. She's the leader of the pack.

\---

James groaned as hauled the chain-bound Glag into the sky. Jets of magically powered energy blasting from the bottoms of his feet as he channeled more and more power from the surrounding into his body and out of their soles.

Below him, Glag's semi-amorphous sandstone form writhed and wriggled, new limbs sprouting, seemingly at random as they struggled with the enchanted chain and the three blades pinning them onto him. But James had intentionally worked the chain so that in it's numerous loops around the elemental combatant it had formed simple knots. Additionally, while Glag eventually managed to loose Amina's dagger, it struggled with her sword. Curiously it seemed unaware that James's enchanted sword was even there.

Higher and higher they went. James looked back every few seconds to check on Glag and make sure that he hadn't managed to loose himself yet. Each time the arena got smaller, and smaller, and smaller. Eventually even the imperial palace began to look small, and it was nearly a mile across in either direction.

"Okay." He said with a grunt as he struggled to slow, then hover. "I think that's high enough." He looked down at the stone creature struggling below. It had managed to get a few lengths of chain loose, and was now hanging some twenty feet below instead of the ten or so that it had been when James had lifted off. But he still had at least another fifty feet of chain left before he was free, and James's sword was still embedded deeply into its side.

"GLAAAAG!" It bellowed at him angrily, its two large black eyes focused on him.

"Yeah glag you to bud." He shot back. "Wanna be back with your friends again?" He asked.

"GLAG?"

"Cool." James said as he blasted down past Glag, to the end of the chain, then under and back up. Glag wobbled a bit from the sudden redirection, and James used the shift in weight to begin swinging him back and forth, with each swing growing in angle and speed.

It took a minute or so, but eventually James was able to get the bundle of rock monster swinging enough that he was able to use his strength to swing him into a loop over him.

"Glaaaaaaa------aaaaaa**GGG!"** The confused thing yelled as it began to loop around James faster and faster. Parts of it began to crack and flake off as it was pressed into the magical chain by centrifugal gravity.

"DING!" James exclaimed loudly as he got the spin going about as fast as his equilibrium could handle. "EXPRESS ELEVATOR GOING DOWN! FIRST FLOOR! APPLIANCES! FURNITURE! MASSIVE CHUNKS OF BROKEN BOULDER!"

And as Glag attempted to speak his singular phrase once more in confusion, James released him like an old fashioned slingshot straight down.

"GLAAAAAAAAAAAAA^(AAAAAAAAgggggg!")

James paused for a second as he watched the elemental hurtle toward the ground. He took just a moment to get his stomach back in place.

"Oh that was a lot of spinning." He said to himself. Then he looked down. "Should probably make sure I aimed that right.

He flipped himself over with a quick burst from his feet.

BOOM!

And he began chasing the new asteroid known as Glag.

\----------

Amina craned her head up and back as she watched the sky. She wasn't the only one. Not even close.

She was effecctively the only combatant left in the arena at this point, Raend having quickly been retrieved by several of the arena staff and dragged back into the tunnels leading out so he could be attended by healers.

Glag's place on the announcers stand now had two flags in it as a result of the penalty his injury to the hammer wielding mercenary. Even now Amina hefted the massive, enchanted, hammer in her hands. She swung it up and down lazily so that it would strike the ground near her feet, keeping its enchantment active by extending it with each strike. She wanted it ready in case this didn't work against the Glag.

Something glinted in the sky above, and a faint noise could be heard coming from it.

"It's them!" Someone in the crowd exclaimed. She glanced that way and saw a were-eagle staring up at the object. Their eyes were much stronger than anyone else's, and sure enough a few others like them began sounding off with confirming exclamations.

Obviously. She thought. *Who or what else would it be?*

James wasn't going to be happy about the results of the impending attack. The announcer had made the statement of it only a few seconds after James and the trailing Glag had lifted off into the sky.

But at least she'd be champion. Assuming she could defeat the Glag in the few moments before it recovered. And that was assuming it COULD recover from this.

^("AAAAAAAAAA)AAAAAAAAA**GGGG!!!"** They all heard from above.

From where he was standing in his viewing box, the Emperor began to sign furiously to the arena mages. His translator gave the command in a yell.

"GET THE ARENA SHIELDS UP NOW!" She demanded in a tone that Amina hadn't heard her use the day before.

Amina's eyes went wide as she saw how fast the Glag was hurtling towards the ground. Then she saw the twin Jets of James's flying magic burning out from behind it and realized that he was PUSHING THE DAMN THING!

"JAMES YOU UTTER BAS-" She yelled to nobody in particular before dashing behind one of the few remaining pillars, ducking down behind her shield, and raising a magical shield on top of that, though she'd never been terribly good at conjuring them.

Amina had felt her share of insanely overpowered impacts in her life. She'd been hit in combat by creatures that could crush a man with a single blow, and been saved only by skill, luck, and armor.

She'd been on the receiving end of attacks by siege weapons of all kinds, including trebuchets. Though she'd only been NEAR the landing spot for the latter, and only so that she and a few of her fellow sergeants at the time could be familiar with what an impact from one of them was like in case they ever needed to maintain their bearing during a siege.

Then of course there had been the battles of Jadesport and, more directly, the battle in the desert, where she'd been yards away from the impact point of the insanely devastating earth weapons known as thermobarics.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11zxsxq/wait_is_this_just_gate_335/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (333/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11wx7p8/wait_is_this_just_gate_332/)

Writer's note: Who needs to clean a shotgun when you can drive nails into solid wood with nothing but your hands?

And once again; Big CGI action sequence. Gotta love em.

Enjoy.

\~

"So. These people you are converting." De'Lius said as he reached up and pressed one of the nails into the wall, holding the silver and steel mesh in place. He didn't use a hammer, or any other tool for that matter, to drive the nail into the wood. "They are dying?"

Vickers kicked the small step stool over to where he was working and stepped up onto it so he could do the same. Unlike the Outer Light Commander he used a hammer to drive the nail in.

"Yeah." He replied. "One of them is almost dead already. She's got maybe a few days left."

"They are your friends?" The old wolf asked.

"Eh. Not so much. More like.... distant coworkers." Vickers admitted.

"I thought you were a part of your world's military?" De'Lius wondered. "Would that not make them brothers in arms at the least?"

"It's uh.... complicated." Vickers said hesitantly. "We work for the same government. But we're not the same branch of the military. I think technically they're considered Marines?" He wondered. Even with two of

them under his care he hadn't been given very much information about them besides what was deemed necessary. "Plus one of them tried to kill me a few months ago. Didn't work out for her."

"Is she the one that is near death?"

"Ya." Vickers said simply.

"Is that fight why?" De'Lius followed up.

"Ya."

"Hmm." The Commander said.

The two of them worked in silence for several more minutes. Pressing the mesh in place then driving in nails to hold it. Then changing position and repeating.

"So um...." Vickers began after the silence had drawn on long enough to feel awkward. "What did uh... Atrafar tell you? About me?"

De'Lius paused for a moment. Then resumed working.

"Only that she'd converted a man from another world. That his were-form manifested into a night brother. And that he was remarkably apt at adjusting to his new body." The old wolf said as he drove in another nail with the pad of his thumb. "Said that he was one of the few people she'd ever met who could keep up with her in a fight even before he'd converted, and that she was curious to how capable he would be AFTER converting."

Vickers considered that for a few moments. It was true that the two of them had bonded over their ability to fight. Hell, their first night together had been right after spending several hours in a tavern's fighting ring, winning gold for beating people up.

"Yeah. That sounds like her alright." Vickers said. "Ever the warrior."

"She also wrote about how you saved her in the battle of the Druidic Forrest." De'Lius added. "And only a week or so after having been converted."

"That's... also accurate." Vickers said.

"All in all she seemed quite taken with you." De'Lius admitted.

"She did?" Vickers asked.

De'Lius stopped what he was doing and turned to face Vickers. Vickers in turn pulled the last two nails from his mouth and turned to match.

"Mister Vickers. I raised my daughter to be a warrior and follow in my footsteps. If she admits being impressed with someone's combat and survival abilities then it's as good as admitting she has a crush on

them." The large wolf said. "She's a grown woman. Who she lies with or doesn't is no business of mine. A few years ago it might have been if it began interfering with her duties to the Outer Light. But, I'm retired."

"She didn't ask you to come here and help me?" Vickers wondered.

"She doesn't even know I'm here." De'Lius revealed. "She and the Conversion party still have another three or four towns to visit before their current circuit is completed and they head back to the Lunar Council City. The Council simply asked me to reactivate for a few weeks to come here, oversee an emergency conversion, and then return back to my home. My employers in Jadesport needed some of their goods delivered to the capital for distribution, and as their Head of Security I was allowed to come along as escort."

"Huh." Vickers said. The whole thing made sense to him. Minus one part. "I thought that service to the Outer Light was for life." He said. "Didn't know you could retire."

"For most that is the case." De'Lius confirmed. "Standard term of service is two centuries. Most Outer Light members are either killed or maimed beyond serviceability well before then. It's a dangerous job. I just got lucky is all."

"Did you say two centuries?" Vickers asked in surprise.

"Yes." De'Lius confirmed. "My family line is descended of elves and giants." He said with a gesture at his immense size. "Couple that with the regenerative properties of being a second generation member of the folk and I will likely live another century and a half. Maybe two. Assuming my current job doesn't get me killed."

"And Atrafar?" Vickers wondered.

"Eh." The old wolf huffed. "Her mother was descended from humans and dwarves. "She's a bit of a runt as a result. But she'll still live at least two, two and a half maybe." Then he saw the surprised expression on Vickers' face. "Relax. Even as a human you'll probably get a century and a half. So long as nothing kills ya first."

"Huh." Vickers grunted. He'd known about the extension of life. It made sense with the regeneration stuff. But he hadn't expected it to be THAT much of an extension.

"Come." De'Lius said. "We are nearly done with this room." He said as he pressed the last nail in place for his wall and began walking out to grab the supplies for the next room. "Tell me about these two you intend to convert."

Vickers quickly hammered the last two of his nails in place and then hustled to follow.

"Can't really tell you too much." He said as he caught up. "Government secrets and what not. One of em wants to be a squirrel apparently."

But he told what he could.

\---------------------------

"\[As is custom, the final match shall be the four warriors who have won their respective fighting brackets.\]" The announcer explained to the crowd for anyone unfamiliar. James was glad that he'd put his medallion back on, even if it was uncomfortable underneath his armor. "\[If a fighter's hit indicator is activated seven times they are eliminated and shall be locked in place, their body shielded by the last of the device's magic until the fight is over. Magic is allowed from the start. Still no intentionally lethal or injurious attacks allowed.\]" James ignored the way almost everyone seemed to focus on him for a moment. "\[One of the four remaining contestants is already at a two strike disadvantage.\]" This time everyone DID look at him.

James waved and smiled sarcastically.

Amina stood on her pedestal at the opposite side of the arena. Raend was on the one to James's right, his massive hammer already in hand and its head glowing with a faint bluish-white light. Glag stood in the same expressionless stupor as before across from the hammer wielding mercenary.

James began spinning his chain, his sword already attached to the end of it and eager to head toward Glag. Even the magic in the weapon was registering the odd, seemingly mindless, rock creature as the biggest threat now.

What the fuck is this guy? He wondered to himself.

"\[LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE ARENA!\]" The announcer said, their explanation finished. Cheers began to rise from the crowd and James's eyes began to glow. Amina's matched across the way.

There was a deep grinding noise coming from Glag's pedestal.

"\[LET THE LAST FIGHT!\]" The announcer said as they raised the golden banner of the final match up. Then he dropped it in a flourish. "\[BEGIN!\]"

James flew over to the space where Glag had been in a flash, arriving in less time than it would have taken for a normal person to blink.

And struck nothing.

"JAMES!" Amina yelled at the same moment that he heard, and felt, a massive impact in the ground behind and to the side of him.

He turned and saw something that his mind immediately related to an old video game.

Sonic the fucking hedgehog? He thought.

"COME ON THEN!" He heard the smoky, baritone, voice of Raend yell in protest as he saw the man winding up with his hammer like he was about to hit a homerun.

Glag, who had only seconds before been staring into the arena like a brain-dead simpleton, was now rolling along the floor of the arena so fast that James honestly wasn't sure he'd be able to keep up with him without using magic.

Amina flew in in a flash and slammed her shield into the side of the rolling Glag, attempting to change his trajectory, but instead found herself bouncing off of it harmlessly and having to recover her footing as she staggered off to the side.

There was a loud impact, accompanied by a cracking noise that reminded James of when he'd cracked a geode in his middle school science class.

"ARGH!" Raend yelled in surprise as he flew back, his chest glowing blue as the device there marked him as being struck. In the announcer's box a black flag was placed next to his name. None were placed next to Glag's despite Raend having hit him head on with his hammer.

Then the mercenary slammed violently into the arena wall some twenty feet behind where he'd met the rock creature, causing a massive crack to form in the wall from the impact.

Another black flag went under his name.

They're even counting non-combat impacts? James realized. *Shit.*

"JAMES!" Amina yelled in warning.

Then James realized that the ball of living sandstone was headed his way.

He wasn't dumb enough to think that he could match the creature in strength the way the mercenary had tried. This despite his sword's protests to the contrary.

BOOM!

James rocketed up over the remarkably fast ball of sandstone and watched as it quickly altered it's trajectory with a slap of its outstretched arm against the ground. In a flash it was looping around in a tight hairpin turn and angling toward where Amina was standing with her shield and a fire blast readied in her hand.

James charged wind magic into his and his hand flashed forward.

The Pneumatic Punch impacted Glag at the same moment that Amina's lance of fire splashed off of his front side. The pneumatic punch had the desired effect, mostly, as it hit Glag and knocked a chunk of stone off of his side. But more importantly it threw his high speed roll off balance, causing it to wobble and change trajectory wildly before it

could re-stabilize. As a result it flew past Amina's dodging form, missing her my mere inches.

But the arm it reached out for her didn't.

Glag swiped a massive, cudgel-like fist at Amina as he flew past. Only her enhanced reflexes and years of experience allowed her to escape unharmed, the hand clanging against her shield as she used the impact to move back several yards in a leap.

Glag slammed into one of the few stone columns and embedded himself into it, causing the whole thing to topple over on top of itself.

James poured more pneumatic punches into its temporarily halted form as he landed and began approaching.

"THIS IS FOR THAT FIRST HIT YOU BASTARD!" Raend yelled as he quickly stepped in and began hammering at the Glag fiercely. There were sickening crunches and groans from Glag as it weathered the offensive.

But James didn't see any flags being placed underneath his name when he looked over.

"YEARGH!" Raend exclaimed suddenly as his hammer was seized and he was lifted up in the air. James watched as one of his legs was slammed into the side of the arm holding him up as one of the pneumatic punches he'd sent impacted with the back of the mercenary's leg and accidentally made him kick Glag.

A black flag was placed under Raend's name.

"My bad!" James yelled.

Then Raend was flying.

James and Amina watched him soar over them and across the arena in a rush.

"AAAAAAAAHHHH!" He yelled as he flew over and landed in a heap.

Another black flag was placed under his name.

There was a loud rumbling grinding noise from where he'd come from.

And Glag began to stand up. As he did he took one of the massive chunks of column rubble and placed it in his mouth. It disappeared in seconds.

"Is he bigger?" James asked.

When the match had started Glag had been all of three feet tall, and a few feet wide.

But as James and Amina looked up they saw that he had grown to nearly ten feet tall.

"Yep." Amina said. "Warned you."

"YOU DIDN'T WARN ME THAT IT WOULD GET BIGGER!" He yelled in frustration as a pair of large spike protrusions formed on its shoulders. He pointed at the Glag as it reached up and broke the spikes off with each and and began reeling back to throw one. "OR THAT IT COULD DO THAT!"

"That is new." She admitted. "MOVE!"

"NO SHIT!" James yelled as he blasted over, grabbed her around the waist, and continued on, avoiding the nearly six foot long sandstone spike as it slammed into the space Amina had been in.

He kept his eyes on the massive half elemental, and as he did he saw something interesting.

Where his pneumatic punches had impacted there were still cracks in its outer layers. They weren't big. And most of them seemed to be healing at a rapid rate. But they were lingering.

"I've got an-" He began before having to blast into a redirect to avoid the second spike. "I have an idea."

James landed behind a pillar and set her down. Then he handed her the handle to his chain weapon.

"You've never seen Star Wars." He said as he lifted the sword at his end of it up.. "So just follow my lead." Then he looked at his sword. "You've got a part of my soul forged into you." He said to it hesitantly. "Do me a favor and prove it."

KRAKOOOSH!

Both of their eyes went wide as Amina ducked down instinctively.

James ignored the fact that he had just nearly been beheaded by a massive stone spear and reached up to absent mindedly brush some dust and debris out of his hair.

The top of the pillar they were behind had just been obliterated by Glag.

"That was our cue." He said as he led her out from behind the cover.

Raend charged in from behind Glag and began hammering at the back of its leg with his weapon. There was an odd glow around his hands and his hammer's head was shining with that same ethereal blue/white light from earlier again. A massive chunk of Glag's leg, what would have been his calf if he were made of flesh, flew off of him and rolled across the arena floor.

Glag turned with one of the spikes in his hand and grabbed it with his other hand to use it like a club. But Raend kept hammering.

Can it only focus on one direction at a time? James wondered. *If so then thank you Raend.*

"Hold on tight!" James instructed as he spun a length of the chain on his end and threw the sword at Glag. Before it could impact his hand flashed out and slammed a pneumatic punch into the space he'd aimed for.

The pneumatic punch impacted on the side of Glag's torso, throwing him off balance as he swung the club down at the hammer wielding mercenary. It ended up only getting a glancing blow on the man's shoulder, or at least it looked like a glancing blow. James had a feeling he wouldn't have shrugged that hit off as well. But it seemed to roll of of Raend's body like water as he continued hammering, taking progressively larger and larger chunks off with each swing.

Then James's sword sunk into the crack that had been left behind by his spell.

"NOW!" He yelled at Amina. He pointed to the side. "RUN!"

She nodded and began running, pulling the chain handle as tight as she could while she went. James ran the opposite direction, blasting more of the pneumatic punches at the thing to keep its attention.

Instead Glag continued assaulting Raend.

The Mercenary bean laughing as he ignored the incoming blows, focusing instead on repeatedly slamming his hammer into Glag, now focusing on his other leg as the first one had all but been severed by the blows. Even as James watched Glag's stability grew faulty and he teetered over a bit as the combination of Raend's assault, Amina's pulling, and James's blasts, began forcing him over to the side.

Curiously, though James was too focused to notice it, flags weren't being placed for Raend or Glag.

After a few moments of the scramble, and as Amina and the chain came around near James, Glag toppled over sideways. The move pulled Amina off her feet for a moment. She quickly got her feet back underneath her and kept the chain taut.

The Glag slammed to the ground in a cloud of sand and powdered stone. Raend didn't relent, slamming his hammer into it like he was driving railroad spikes.

"That it?" James asked, hopefully.

"Not a chance!" Amina yelled as she flew past him, throwing the rest of his chain at him as she closed the distance. She drew her sword as she leapt into the air and onto the fallen earth elemental.

She landed with her sword in a two handed stab and drove it into Glag's body, piercing one of the links of James's chain in the process. There was a grinding noise from inside Glag as it acknowledged what James hoped

was a strike. But when he looked there still weren't any flags in the things space.

Amina was on the verge of drawing her dagger and adding another pinning point to the chain when Raend screamed again. This time it wasn't a scream of battle lust or surprise. Rather, it was a blood curdling sound of pain and unexpected fear.

The arena, which had been cheering the entire time, froze as they heard the sickening crunch of bone in Raend's leg.

One of Glag's hands had slammed the thing into the ground like a wrecking ball, and as Raend fell back it was clear that his leg was ruined. Blood dripped from the end of Glag's fist as it rose back up.

"Amina!" James yelled as he realized what was happening.

GLAG! GLAG! GLAG!

The crowd chanted.

Amina leapt up and away from the stone monster. But too late.

The other hand seemed to form from the very part of Glag she'd been standing on, readying her dagger to strike.

It hit her so fast and so violently that James couldn't tell whether or not she'd gotten her shield in the way as she flew past him. He didn't have time to check the flags.

"SONOFABITCH!" He yelled as he poured wind energy into the chain and made it wind around the extended arm.

Glag slammed the hand onto the ground and began to rise back up onto his feet. A new one emerged from his body to replace the damaged one, which his other leg stepped on and immediately began absorbing. As its arm hit the ground it pulled James forward and off balance.

It's like the blood golem. He realized as he staggered forward.

"Good." He said. "I beat that thing just fine."

BOOM!

James flew toward the thing, snaking his chain around it as he passed, and slid between its legs.

Glag spun to react, bring it's arm around to strike at him. But James didn't stop moving.

BOOM!

Up into the air, missing the swipe by a mile.

Bo-Pop! Po-Po-Pop!

He quickly flitted around the arm and back into the space he'd just left. Then slid down underneath it again.

"GLAAAAG!" It bellowed as James zipped around it's leg.

Then he stood up straight, the last ten feet or so of chain held taut between himself and the massive monster.

"Hey Glag!" He shouted and watched as the thing turned, completely oblivious of the meaning of the chain rattling around its body. "You ever think you were gonna fly?!?!"

The thing's head tilted. Though unlike a normal body the head simply rotated, as if it had a joint specifically for rotating its face.

"Glag." It said, and James thought that it sounded confused. Though it was hard to tell since his medallion apparently didn't translate Glag-ese or whatever.

"Get ready." James said.

Suddenly there was a flash of steel, crimson cloth, and a blue shield as Amina slammed into Glag's back, her dagger in one hand in a stabbing hold. Her shield followed up, slamming the dagger in like a nail.

That broke Glag out of it's confusion as he reeled and began trying to turn.

The second his left foot left the ground James moved.

BOOM!

He flew straight up, pulling Glag off of its feet.

Then he threw on the after burners.

FFFFFFOOOOOOOOOOOOOSH!

His arms strained against the mass of the elemental, and he began to wonder if he had enough lift to pull this off. He also faintly wondered if his chain would hold.

Beneath him, though he couldn't see it, Glag reached out to try to grab on to some of the rubble that he still hadn't absorbed.

This was made feeble by Amina walking calmly over near Raend's immobilized body and lifting his hammer. Then she walked back over near Glag, and began slamming the immense weapon into the arm.

With each hit she felt the magic within the enchanted weapon growing stronger.

She paused, for just a split second, as she realized what it was doing.

Then she redoubled her efforts.

"GLAAAAG!" Glag yelled in protest.

"SHUT!" She yelled as she took one last swing at its arm. The hammer's enchantment adding more and more force to each consecutive hit, while also making her swing faster. "UP!" She finished as the hammer head smashed through the last bit of rock keeping the arm attached to Glag's body.

Then he and James began to rise once and for all.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11z0ww9/wait_is_this_just_gate_334/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (333/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11wx56u/wait_is_this_just_gate_332/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Who needs to clean a shotgun when you can drive nails into solid wood with nothing but your hands?

And once again; Big CGI action sequence. Gotta love em.

Enjoy.

\~

"So. These people you are converting." De'Lius said as he reached up and pressed one of the nails into the wall, holding the silver and steel mesh in place. He didn't use a hammer, or any other tool for that matter, to drive the nail into the wood. "They are dying?"

Vickers kicked the small step stool over to where he was working and stepped up onto it so he could do the same. Unlike the Outer Light Commander he used a hammer to drive the nail in.

"Yeah." He replied. "One of them is almost dead already. She's got maybe a few days left."

"They are your friends?" The old wolf asked.

"Eh. Not so much. More like.... distant coworkers." Vickers admitted.

"I thought you were a part of your world's military?" De'Lius wondered. "Would that not make them brothers in arms at the least?"

"It's uh.... complicated." Vickers said hesitantly. "We work for the same government. But we're not the same branch of the military. I think

technically they're considered Marines?" He wondered. Even with two of them under his care he hadn't been given very much information about them besides what was deemed necessary. "Plus one of them tried to kill me a few months ago. Didn't work out for her."

"Is she the one that is near death?"

"Ya." Vickers said simply.

"Is that fight why?" De'Lius followed up.

"Ya."

"Hmm." The Commander said.

The two of them worked in silence for several more minutes. Pressing the mesh in place then driving in nails to hold it. Then changing position and repeating.

"So um...." Vickers began after the silence had drawn on long enough to feel awkward. "What did uh... Atrafar tell you? About me?"

De'Lius paused for a moment. Then resumed working.

"Only that she'd converted a man from another world. That his were-form manifested into a night brother. And that he was remarkably apt at adjusting to his new body." The old wolf said as he drove in another nail with the pad of his thumb. "Said that he was one of the few people she'd ever met who could keep up with her in a fight even before he'd converted, and that she was curious to how capable he would be AFTER converting."

Vickers considered that for a few moments. It was true that the two of them had bonded over their ability to fight. Hell, their first night together had been right after spending several hours in a tavern's fighting ring, winning gold for beating people up.

"Yeah. That sounds like her alright." Vickers said. "Ever the warrior."

"She also wrote about how you saved her in the battle of the Druidic Forrest." De'Lius added. "And only a week or so after having been converted."

"That's... also accurate." Vickers said.

"All in all she seemed quite taken with you." De'Lius admitted.

"She did?" Vickers asked.

De'Lius stopped what he was doing and turned to face Vickers. Vickers in turn pulled the last two nails from his mouth and turned to match.

"Mister Vickers. I raised my daughter to be a warrior and follow in my footsteps. If she admits being impressed with someone's combat and

survival abilities then it's as good as admitting she has a crush on them." The large wolf said. "She's a grown woman. Who she lies with or doesn't is no business of mine. A few years ago it might have been if it began interfering with her duties to the Outer Light. But, I'm retired."

"She didn't ask you to come here and help me?" Vickers wondered.

"She doesn't even know I'm here." De'Lius revealed. "She and the Conversion party still have another three or four towns to visit before their current circuit is completed and they head back to the Lunar Council City. The Council simply asked me to reactivate for a few weeks to come here, oversee an emergency conversion, and then return back to my home. My employers in Jadesport needed some of their goods delivered to the capital for distribution, and as their Head of Security I was allowed to come along as escort."

"Huh." Vickers said. The whole thing made sense to him. Minus one part. "I thought that service to the Outer Light was for life." He said. "Didn't know you could retire."

"For most that is the case." De'Lius confirmed. "Standard term of service is two centuries. Most Outer Light members are either killed or maimed beyond serviceability well before then. It's a dangerous job. I just got lucky is all."

"Did you say two centuries?" Vickers asked in surprise.

"Yes." De'Lius confirmed. "My family line is descended of elves and giants." He said with a gesture at his immense size. "Couple that with the regenerative properties of being a second generation member of the folk and I will likely live another century and a half. Maybe two. Assuming my current job doesn't get me killed."

"And Atrafar?" Vickers wondered.

"Eh." The old wolf huffed. "Her mother was descended from humans and dwarves. "She's a bit of a runt as a result. But she'll still live at least two, two and a half maybe." Then he saw the surprised expression on Vickers' face. "Relax. Even as a human you'll probably get a century and a half. So long as nothing kills ya first."

"Huh." Vickers grunted. He'd known about the extension of life. It made sense with the regeneration stuff. But he hadn't expected it to be THAT much of an extension.

"Come." De'Lius said. "We are nearly done with this room." He said as he pressed the last nail in place for his wall and began walking out to grab the supplies for the next room. "Tell me about these two you intend to convert."

Vickers quickly hammered the last two of his nails in place and then hustled to follow.

"Can't really tell you too much." He said as he caught up. "Government secrets and what not. One of em wants to be a squirrel apparently."

But he told what he could.

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"\[As is custom, the final match shall be the four warriors who have won their respective fighting brackets.\]" The announcer explained to the crowd for anyone unfamiliar. James was glad that he'd put his medallion back on, even if it was uncomfortable underneath his armor. "\[If a fighter's hit indicator is activated seven times they are eliminated and shall be locked in place, their body shielded by the last of the device's magic until the fight is over. Magic is allowed from the start. Still no intentionally lethal or injurious attacks allowed.\]" James ignored the way almost everyone seemed to focus on him for a moment. "\[One of the four remaining contestants is already at a two strike disadvantage.\]" This time everyone DID look at him.

James waved and smiled sarcastically.

Amina stood on her pedestal at the opposite side of the arena. Raend was on the one to James's right, his massive hammer already in hand and its head glowing with a faint bluish-white light. Glag stood in the same expressionless stupor as before across from the hammer wielding mercenary.

James began spinning his chain, his sword already attached to the end of it and eager to head toward Glag. Even the magic in the weapon was registering the odd, seemingly mindless, rock creature as the biggest threat now.

What the fuck is this guy? He wondered to himself.

"\[LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE ARENA!\]" The announcer said, their explanation finished. Cheers began to rise from the crowd and James's eyes began to glow. Amina's matched across the way.

There was a deep grinding noise coming from Glag's pedestal.

"\[LET THE LAST FIGHT!\]" The announcer said as they raised the golden banner of the final match up. Then he dropped it in a flourish. "\[BEGIN!\]"

James flew over to the space where Glag had been in a flash, arriving in less time than it would have taken for a normal person to blink.

And struck nothing.

"JAMES!" Amina yelled at the same moment that he heard, and felt, a massive impact in the ground behind and to the side of him.

He turned and saw something that his mind immediately related to an old video game.

Sonic the fucking hedgehog? He thought.

"COME ON THEN!" He heard the smoky, baritone, voice of Raend yell in protest as he saw the man winding up with his hammer like he was about to hit a homerun.

Glag, who had only seconds before been staring into the arena like a brain-dead simpleton, was now rolling along the floor of the arena so fast that James honestly wasn't sure he'd be able to keep up with him without using magic.

Amina flew in in a flash and slammed her shield into the side of the rolling Glag, attempting to change his trajectory, but instead found herself bouncing off of it harmlessly and having to recover her footing as she staggered off to the side.

There was a loud impact, accompanied by a cracking noise that reminded James of when he'd cracked a geode in his middle school science class.

"ARGH!" Raend yelled in surprise as he flew back, his chest glowing blue as the device there marked him as being struck. In the announcer's box a black flag was placed next to his name. None were placed next to Glag's despite Raend having hit him head on with his hammer.

Then the mercenary slammed violently into the arena wall some twenty feet behind where he'd met the rock creature, causing a massive crack to form in the wall from the impact.

Another black flag went under his name.

They're even counting non-combat impacts? James realized. *Shit.*

"JAMES!" Amina yelled in warning.

Then James realized that the ball of living sandstone was headed his way.

He wasn't dumb enough to think that he could match the creature in strength the way the mercenary had tried. This despite his sword's protests to the contrary.

BOOM!

James rocketed up over the remarkably fast ball of sandstone and watched as it quickly altered it's trajectory with a slap of its outstretched arm against the ground. In a flash it was looping around in a tight hairpin turn and angling toward where Amina was standing with her shield and a fire blast readied in her hand.

James charged wind magic into his and his hand flashed forward.

The Pneumatic Punch impacted Glag at the same moment that Amina's lance of fire splashed off of his front side. The pneumatic punch had the desired effect, mostly, as it hit Glag and knocked a chunk of stone off

of his side. But more importantly it threw his high speed roll off balance, causing it to wobble and change trajectory wildly before it could re-stabilize. As a result it flew past Amina's dodging form, missing her my mere inches.

But the arm it reached out for her didn't.

Glag swiped a massive, cudgel-like fist at Amina as he flew past. Only her enhanced reflexes and years of experience allowed her to escape unharmed, the hand clanging against her shield as she used the impact to move back several yards in a leap.

Glag slammed into one of the few stone columns and embedded himself into it, causing the whole thing to topple over on top of itself.

James poured more pneumatic punches into its temporarily halted form as he landed and began approaching.

"THIS IS FOR THAT FIRST HIT YOU BASTARD!" Raend yelled as he quickly stepped in and began hammering at the Glag fiercely. There were sickening crunches and groans from Glag as it weathered the offensive.

But James didn't see any flags being placed underneath his name when he looked over.

"YEARGH!" Raend exclaimed suddenly as his hammer was seized and he was lifted up in the air. James watched as one of his legs was slammed into the side of the arm holding him up as one of the pneumatic punches he'd sent impacted with the back of the mercenary's leg and accidentally made him kick Glag.

A black flag was placed under Raend's name.

"My bad!" James yelled.

Then Raend was flying.

James and Amina watched him soar over them and across the arena in a rush.

"AAAAAAAAHHHH!" He yelled as he flew over and landed in a heap.

Another black flag was placed under his name.

There was a loud rumbling grinding noise from where he'd come from.

And Glag began to stand up. As he did he took one of the massive chunks of column rubble and placed it in his mouth. It disappeared in seconds.

"Is he bigger?" James asked.

When the match had started Glag had been all of three feet tall, and a few feet wide.

But as James and Amina looked up they saw that he had grown to nearly ten feet tall.

"Yep." Amina said. "Warned you."

"YOU DIDN'T WARN ME THAT IT WOULD GET BIGGER!" He yelled in frustration as a pair of large spike protrusions formed on its shoulders. He pointed at the Glag as it reached up and broke the spikes off with each and and began reeling back to throw one. "OR THAT IT COULD DO THAT!"

"That is new." She admitted. "MOVE!"

"NO SHIT!" James yelled as he blasted over, grabbed her around the waist, and continued on, avoiding the nearly six foot long sandstone spike as it slammed into the space Amina had been in.

He kept his eyes on the massive half elemental, and as he did he saw something interesting.

Where his pneumatic punches had impacted there were still cracks in its outer layers. They weren't big. And most of them seemed to be healing at a rapid rate. But they were lingering.

"I've got an-" He began before having to blast into a redirect to avoid the second spike. "I have an idea."

James landed behind a pillar and set her down. Then he handed her the handle to his chain weapon.

"You've never seen Star Wars." He said as he lifted the sword at his end of it up.. "So just follow my lead." Then he looked at his sword. "You've got a part of my soul forged into you." He said to it hesitantly. "Do me a favor and prove it."

KRAKOOOSH!

Both of their eyes went wide as Amina ducked down instinctively.

James ignored the fact that he had just nearly been beheaded by a massive stone spear and reached up to absent mindedly brush some dust and debris out of his hair.

The top of the pillar they were behind had just been obliterated by Glag.

"That was our cue." He said as he led her out from behind the cover.

Raend charged in from behind Glag and began hammering at the back of its leg with his weapon. There was an odd glow around his hands and his hammer's head was shining with that same ethereal blue/white light from earlier again. A massive chunk of Glag's leg, what would have been his calf if he were made of flesh, flew off of him and rolled across the arena floor.

Glag turned with one of the spikes in his hand and grabbed it with his other hand to use it like a club. But Raend kept hammering.

Can it only focus on one direction at a time? James wondered. *If so then thank you Raend.*

"Hold on tight!" James instructed as he spun a length of the chain on his end and threw the sword at Glag. Before it could impact his hand flashed out and slammed a pneumatic punch into the space he'd aimed for.

The pneumatic punch impacted on the side of Glag's torso, throwing him off balance as he swung the club down at the hammer wielding mercenary. It ended up only getting a glancing blow on the man's shoulder, or at least it looked like a glancing blow. James had a feeling he wouldn't have shrugged that hit off as well. But it seemed to roll of of Raend's body like water as he continued hammering, taking progressively larger and larger chunks off with each swing.

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GLAG! GLAG! GLAG!

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Up into the air, missing the swipe by a mile.

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Then he stood up straight, the last ten feet or so of chain held taut between himself and the massive monster.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11z0v5a/wait_is_this_just_gate_334/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (332/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11u5hgy/wait_is_this_just_gate_331/)

Writer's note: Short sections with updates about all kinds of people. And Vickers faces his greatest threat ever.

Enjoy.

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"So the last round is a four person free for all?" James asked as he saw the tournament finale.

"Yes." Amina said. "Once you've been struck seven times you'll be locked out of the fight and you'll be immobilized and shielded until it's over. Here's what's going to happen."

"So we're really not going to talk about the centaur in the room?" James asked.

"James focus." Amina said, ignoring his quip. "You, myself, and this Raend fellow are going to team up against the Glag."

"Okay so it as A... Glag?" James asked. "Glag isn't its name."

"It's both." Amina said simply. "That's neither here nor there. We need to work together to defeat the Glag or else we'll all be defeated within the first minute of the fight."

James's eyebrows furrowed at that. He looked over at the spot where the Glag(?) was standing in the corner of the room. Once again it seemed to

be staring straight ahead with its mouth agape and drooling out the slurry of stone and saliva.

"That thing?" He asked. "You sure?"

"Okay." Amina said with her hands in front of her face in a prayer position as she took a deep breath. "James, that thing is a sentient variation of an earth elemental. It's faster than it looks. It's.... well... it's not SMARTER than it looks. But it is much more clever than you're probably giving it credit for. Besides which, remember what the devices on out chests are designed to signal for?"

James looked down at the small brass and crystal device. "Yeah. Hits." He said.

She poked his forehead with a finger. "Hits that would be lethal in a real fight." She reminded him. "Which for you and me means basically anything anyone in this tournament can throw at us. Now. Tell me. What's lethal for an elemental made of stone?"

"Oh." He said once he thought of the question for a moment.

"Yeah." She said. Then she made a face and her hand moved to her stomach.

James quickly looked around to see if anyone was watching, and when he saw the one other humanoid fighter in the room, presumably Raend, was busy reading a book, he turned to Amina and moved to provide her a bit of cover.

"You okay?" He asked.

Amina took several deep breaths and steeled herself a bit. "Yes. Though morning sickness is an incredibly inaccurate term."

"Need some water or something?" He asked. Then he thought of the hit she'd taken at the end of her fight with Gorna. "Say, maybe this wasn't a good idea. Having you in this tournament."

"Not a chance." She said as she spit a bit of saliva out into the nearby spittoon. "Besides. There's no way you win against that thing with only two people."

"Seriously?" James asked. "We are talking about that guy right?" He reiterated with a thumb over his shoulder as the two of them approached Raend.

Glag continued staring passively at the rack of spears that was in front of him.

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Vickers had just finished talking to the owner of the building that the letter had specified, the same one he had been converted in, when he heard a familiar armored gait approaching. He folded the letter from the

council and put it in his back pocket, and was walking around the wagon with the silver barbed mesh that would line the rooms for Five and Driscoll when he ran into the owner of the familiar stride pattern.

"Well. Looks like we get to-" His voice trailed off as he looked at the unexpected arrival. Then he looked up higher. "You're not Atrafar." He said with a cocked eyebrow. The hand that had just put the letter away slid up his back until it was resting on his pistol. He'd had to break off and then file down the trigger guard to be able to use it again.

"No. No I'm not." The massive, grey and white muzzled, werewolf in Outer Light armor said with a cocked eyebrow of its own.

"The council sent you?" Vickers asked. "You're overseeing the conversion?"

The wolf looked down at his armor for a moment. "Looks that way." He said. "I assume that you're Chief Anthony Vickers?"

"Yeah." The SEAL answered as the large wolf began to slowly look him up and down.

After a few moments of awkward silence the newcomer spoke up again. "Night brothers are rare. You're smaller than she makes you sound." He said as he approached the wagon and casually lifted one of the silver mesh bundles with his gauntleted hand.

Vickers donned a confused expression. "Than who makes me sound?"

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Wait, is this just GATE? (332/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11u5ez9/wait_is_this_just_gate_331/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Short sections with updates about all kinds of people. And Vickers faces his greatest threat ever.

Enjoy.

\~

"So the last round is a four person free for all?" James asked as he saw the tournament finale.

"Yes." Amina said. "Once you've been struck seven times you'll be locked out of the fight and you'll be immobilized and shielded until it's over. Here's what's going to happen."

"So we're really not going to talk about the centaur in the room?" James asked.

"James focus." Amina said, ignoring his quip. "You, myself, and this Raend fellow are going to team up against the Glag."

"Okay so it as A... Glag?" James asked. "Glag isn't its name."

"It's both." Amina said simply. "That's neither here nor there. We need to work together to defeat the Glag or else we'll all be defeated within the first minute of the fight."

James's eyebrows furrowed at that. He looked over at the spot where the Glag(?) was standing in the corner of the room. Once again it seemed to be staring straight ahead with its mouth agape and drooling out the slurry of stone and saliva.

"That thing?" He asked. "You sure?"

"Okay." Amina said with her hands in front of her face in a prayer position as she took a deep breath. "James, that thing is a sentient variation of an earth elemental. It's faster than it looks. It's.... well... it's not SMARTER than it looks. But it is much more clever than you're probably giving it credit for. Besides which, remember what the devices on out chests are designed to signal for?"

James looked down at the small brass and crystal device. "Yeah. Hits." He said.

She poked his forehead with a finger. "Hits that would be lethal in a real fight." She reminded him. "Which for you and me means basically anything anyone in this tournament can throw at us. Now. Tell me. What's lethal for an elemental made of stone?"

"Oh." He said once he thought of the question for a moment.

"Yeah." She said. Then she made a face and her hand moved to her stomach.

James quickly looked around to see if anyone was watching, and when he saw the one other humanoid fighter in the room, presumably Raend, was busy reading a book, he turned to Amina and moved to provide her a bit of cover.

"You okay?" He asked.

Amina took several deep breaths and steeled herself a bit. "Yes. Though morning sickness is an incredibly inaccurate term."

"Need some water or something?" He asked. Then he thought of the hit she'd taken at the end of her fight with Gorna. "Say, maybe this wasn't a good idea. Having you in this tournament."

"Not a chance." She said as she spit a bit of saliva out into the nearby spittoon. "Besides. There's no way you win against that thing with only two people."

"Seriously?" James asked. "We are talking about that guy right?" He reiterated with a thumb over his shoulder as the two of them approached Raend.

Glag continued staring passively at the rack of spears that was in front of him.

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Vickers had just finished talking to the owner of the building that the letter had specified, the same one he had been converted in, when he heard a familiar armored gait approaching. He folded the letter from the council and put it in his back pocket, and was walking around the wagon with the silver barbed mesh that would line the rooms for Five and Driscoll when he ran into the owner of the familiar stride pattern.

"Well. Looks like we get to-" His voice trailed off as he looked at the unexpected arrival. Then he looked up higher. "You're not Atrafar." He said with a cocked eyebrow. The hand that had just put the letter away slid up his back until it was resting on his pistol. He'd had to break off and then file down the trigger guard to be able to use it again.

"No. No I'm not." The massive, grey and white muzzled, werewolf in Outer Light armor said with a cocked eyebrow of its own.

"The council sent you?" Vickers asked. "You're overseeing the conversion?"

The wolf looked down at his armor for a moment. "Looks that way." He said. "I assume that you're Chief Anthony Vickers?"

"Yeah." The SEAL answered as the large wolf began to slowly look him up and down.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (331/?)

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Amina slipped on the grinder wheel, catching her finger in it, as Gorna spoke the words. She cursed for a moment before setting her blade edge back on it and pedaling the wheel into motion again.

Then she looked at the centaur.

"Gorna." She said stiffly. "Would you please retrieve my armor for me?"

Gorna didn't even hestitate, turning quickly and trotting the three or so steps over to the stand Amina had set it on, then back, and handing it to her.

Amina dropped it next to her feet.

"There. You've rendered me a service. And now I find your indenture as my servant... FULFILLED." Amina said with a note of finality.

"It's not that simple and you know it." Gorna said angrily.

James looked around at the other fighters, the vast majority of whom seemed to be making a point of NOT looking at the two arguing women. Minus one short and wide creature that James thought might have been made of sandstone. It stared at them with blank eyes and some kind of muddy saliva dripping from the edges of its mouth, which hung open. James looked at it curiously, wondering what it was. He was waiting for it to move, to even breath, when Amina called for him again.

"James." She called as she handed him her damaged sword. He looked at it and was surprised to find several large cracks running through it in different parts. He quickly slid it into the bag that he'd pulled the

other one from. "Can you please help me with this?" She asked, pointing at Gorna.

"I have no idea what's going on." He admitted. "It sounds like some kinda werewolf packing thing like when I shot Kela." He grimaced at the thought. "And uh... yeah." He said softly as he looked up at the centaur, who was glowering down at him. "Neither of us is in a good spot, like.... emotionally.... to enter something like that any time soon. Soooooo.... Please... don't.... make us?" He said questioningly.

"The issue is not with you HERO." Gorna said testily. "Your wife is the one who invoked a rider's proposal. She must resolve it. Stay out of it."

"Do not speak to him like that." Amina said with a fierce look in her eyes.

"Apologies mistress." Gorna said with a bow.

"I'm not your mistress." Amina huffed. "I'm nobodies mistress. Please.... Leave me alone."

"I'm afraid the princess is at least correct on one front." Said a new voice. Or at least new to Amina and Gorna, James recognized it from the dressing down he'd gotten just before going up to watch Amina's match. It was the young dwarf that had read his tournament penalties and restrictions to him. "Miss Gorna Daggerdancer. Your time in the tournament is up. I have been patient. But I'm afraid I must ask you to gather your belongings and leave the fighters area so that the remaining contestants can ready themselves for their next matches."

Gorna glared down at the small Arena Staff member. Then stamped her hooves a bit more before moving toward where her personal belongings were.

"This isn't resolved Princess." She said as she left.

"Yes it is." Amina said with mock cheeriness. "Have a nice life. Better luck next tournament."

Once the centaur had been ushered out James turned back to Amina.

"Honey." He said very sternly. "What have I told you about bringing other people into our love life?"

Amina was about to say something cutting, but James continued.

"You gotta at least ask me first. Especially if they're part farm animal." He said.

Her face bore a shocked expression, then she pointed the dagger she'd been sharpening at him.

"James. That's more than a little bit racist." She said in surprise. "And very rude."

James placed the back of his hand on his forehead in a display of fake injury.

"Oh. Freshly married and my wife is already siding with her centaur girlfriend over me. What have I done to deserve such cruelty?" He asked in a Shakespearean tempo and accent. Then he made a show of walking away while clutching his heart. "And on our honeymoon!" He exclaimed over his shoulder

"She's not my girlfriend!" Amina demanded. Then she chuckled as she shook her head in exasperation.

James paused as he neared the slack jawed sandstone creature. It hadn't so much as moved from it's position, and its large black eyes seemed to be staring ahead at Amina, without actually seeing anything. It also didn't seem to be breathing, at least not as far as he could tell.

"What are you?" He asked curiously.

The creature turned to him, the motion causing a grinding noise that made James's ears hurt just a bit. It did so until it was looking up at him, drool still pouring from the sides of its mouth.

"Glag." It said simply.

"Is that what you are?" He asked. "Or your name?"

The creature, Glag potentially, moved its arm up to tap at its chest.

"Glag." It repeated.

James considered this for a moment. Then shrugged and said. "Well that was informative... Nice to meet you Glag."

"Glag." It repeated for a third time.

"Right." James said with a nod. Then he turned and continued on his way.

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"Well." Said the healer as Veliry sat up and refastened the toggles on her robe. "You're with child alright."

"You're certain?" Veliry asked as she got the last toggle in place.

"Oh yes." The elderly woman said as she wrote on her notepad. "The life energy there is Very strong."

"It is?" Veliry asked in surprise.

"Oh very much so. In fact it's siphoned quite a bit of energy from you." She said with a smile.

"It has?" Veliry asked. She knew from her studies that pregnant women gave a portion of their magic to their babies while they were in the womb. But it wasn't supposed to be a lot. Not that that was her field of expertise.

"Relax dear." The healer assured her with a hand over hers. "It's likely just because you're a high level magic users. It's more than normal. But not what I would consider ABNORMAL. Although who knows with how its conception was um... how did you put it? Blessed?"

"Deity empowered." Veliry corrected absently.

"Right. Well... I'm going to call it blessed. Easier to say." The healer said with a light chuckle. "Plus I don't know much about Gods except that they exist."

Veliry ignored the nonsense. "It's siphoning a lot from me." She said, rewinding the conversation a bit. "But I don't HAVE a lot of magic to give right now. Practically none."

"That is true." The healer agreed. "But you've said yourself that you're working on getting it back. Right?"

"I am. But I can barely spark a candle right now." Veliry admitted.

"And maybe that level of weakness is necessary." The healer said.

"What do you mean?" Veliry asked.

The old woman seemed to think for a while.

"Well... It's not often. But sometimes... just every once in a while. When a woman gets pregnant. She'll find herself drained. Physically obviously, especially once they get to the point where they can't sleep for more than twenty minutes before the babe steps on their bladder, and they waddle around like a rhonetops." She chuckled and Veliry couldn't help but smile too. Though she wasn't looking forward to that part of the pregnancy. "But sometimes it's magical too." The healer continued. "Typically that will happen if the unborn child has some kind of.... well... I don't mean to worry you... but if they're sickly, or have a malformation. The magic floods into them, just like it does with our normal bodies, and attempts to fix the damage before it can set in permanently. Am I making sense?"

The thoughts of the developmental struggles Joey, the father, had gone through his entire life, and how they were a combination of unlucky genetics and brain chemistry, ran through her mind.

And suddenly she worried that their child might have to struggle through similar hardships, and hoped that the magic focusing on the unborn child would right the issue before it was born.

"You are." She said as she looked down at her stomach, which still hadn't grown, and likely wouldn't for another month or so.

"I wouldn't worry about it." The healer said with another congenial pat of her hand. "As long as the magical drain doesn't cut off unexpectedly... or increase dramatically AND unexpectedly.... I wouldn't worry about it. In the mean time, keep training, keep trying to grow your reserves. That will only help. And let us know if anything changes.

"I will." Veliry said with a smile that wasn't 100% authentic. "Say. Is Nurse Choi on shift today? I'd like to give her the.... um... good?... news."

The healer smiled. "She should have clocked in only a few minutes ago. Let's see if we can track her down and let her know how her grandson is developing."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (331/?)

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Amina slipped on the grinder wheel, catching her finger in it, as Gorna spoke the words. She cursed for a moment before setting her blade edge back on it and pedaling the wheel into motion again.

Then she looked at the centaur.

"Gorna." She said stiffly. "Would you please retrieve my armor for me?"

Gorna didn't even hestitate, turning quickly and trotting the three or so steps over to the stand Amina had set it on, then back, and handing it to her.

Amina dropped it next to her feet.

"There. You've rendered me a service. And now I find your indenture as my servant... FULFILLED." Amina said with a note of finality.

"It's not that simple and you know it." Gorna said angrily.

James looked around at the other fighters, the vast majority of whom seemed to be making a point of NOT looking at the two arguing women. Minus one short and wide creature that James thought might have been made of sandstone. It stared at them with blank eyes and some kind of muddy saliva dripping from the edges of its mouth, which hung open. James looked at it curiously, wondering what it was. He was waiting for it to move, to even breath, when Amina called for him again.

"James." She called as she handed him her damaged sword. He looked at it and was surprised to find several large cracks running through it in different parts. He quickly slid it into the bag that he'd pulled the other one from. "Can you please help me with this?" She asked, pointing at Gorna.

"I have no idea what's going on." He admitted. "It sounds like some kinda werewolf packing thing like when I shot Kela." He grimaced at the thought. "And uh... yeah." He said softly as he looked up at the centaur, who was glowering down at him. "Neither of us is in a good spot, like.... emotionally.... to enter something like that any time soon. Soooooo.... Please... don't.... make us?" He said questioningly.

"The issue is not with you HERO." Gorna said testily. "Your wife is the one who invoked a rider's proposal. She must resolve it. Stay out of it."

"Do not speak to him like that." Amina said with a fierce look in her eyes.

"Apologies mistress." Gorna said with a bow.

"I'm not your mistress." Amina huffed. "I'm nobodies mistress. Please.... Leave me alone."

"I'm afraid the princess is at least correct on one front." Said a new voice. Or at least new to Amina and Gorna, James recognized it from the dressing down he'd gotten just before going up to watch Amina's match. It was the young dwarf that had read his tournament penalties and restrictions to him. "Miss Gorna Daggerdancer. Your time in the tournament is up. I have been patient. But I'm afraid I must ask you to gather your belongings and leave the fighters area so that the remaining contestants can ready themselves for their next matches."

Gorna glared down at the small Arena Staff member. Then stamped her hooves a bit more before moving toward where her personal belongings were.

"This isn't resolved Princess." She said as she left.

"Yes it is." Amina said with mock cheeriness. "Have a nice life. Better luck next tournament."

Once the centaur had been ushered out James turned back to Amina.

"Honey." He said very sternly. "What have I told you about bringing other people into our love life?"

Amina was about to say something cutting, but James continued.

"You gotta at least ask me first. Especially if they're part farm animal." He said.

Her face bore a shocked expression, then she pointed the dagger she'd been sharpening at him.

"James. That's more than a little bit racist." She said in surprise. "And very rude."

James placed the back of his hand on his forehead in a display of fake injury.

"Oh. Freshly married and my wife is already siding with her centaur girlfriend over me. What have I done to deserve such cruelty?" He asked in a Shakespearean tempo and accent. Then he made a show of walking away while clutching his heart. "And on our honeymoon!" He exclaimed over his shoulder

"She's not my girlfriend!" Amina demanded. Then she chuckled as she shook her head in exasperation.

James paused as he neared the slack jawed sandstone creature. It hadn't so much as moved from it's position, and its large black eyes seemed to be staring ahead at Amina, without actually seeing anything. It also didn't seem to be breathing, at least not as far as he could tell.

"What are you?" He asked curiously.

The creature turned to him, the motion causing a grinding noise that made James's ears hurt just a bit. It did so until it was looking up at him, drool still pouring from the sides of its mouth.

"Glag." It said simply.

"Is that what you are?" He asked. "Or your name?"

The creature, Glag potentially, moved its arm up to tap at its chest.

"Glag." It repeated.

James considered this for a moment. Then shrugged and said. "Well that was informative... Nice to meet you Glag."

"Glag." It repeated for a third time.

"Right." James said with a nod. Then he turned and continued on his way.

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"Well." Said the healer as Veliry sat up and refastened the toggles on her robe. "You're with child alright."

"You're certain?" Veliry asked as she got the last toggle in place.

"Oh yes." The elderly woman said as she wrote on her notepad. "The life energy there is Very strong."

"It is?" Veliry asked in surprise.

"Oh very much so. In fact it's siphoned quite a bit of energy from you." She said with a smile.

"It has?" Veliry asked. She knew from her studies that pregnant women gave a portion of their magic to their babies while they were in the womb. But it wasn't supposed to be a lot. Not that that was her field of expertise.

"Relax dear." The healer assured her with a hand over hers. "It's likely just because you're a high level magic users. It's more than normal. But not what I would consider ABNORMAL. Although who knows with how its conception was um... how did you put it? Blessed?"

"Deity empowered." Veliry corrected absently.

"Right. Well... I'm going to call it blessed. Easier to say." The healer said with a light chuckle. "Plus I don't know much about Gods except that they exist."

Veliry ignored the nonsense. "It's siphoning a lot from me." She said, rewinding the conversation a bit. "But I don't HAVE a lot of magic to give right now. Practically none."

"That is true." The healer agreed. "But you've said yourself that you're working on getting it back. Right?"

"I am. But I can barely spark a candle right now." Veliry admitted.

"And maybe that level of weakness is necessary." The healer said.

"What do you mean?" Veliry asked.

The old woman seemed to think for a while.

"Well... It's not often. But sometimes... just every once in a while. When a woman gets pregnant. She'll find herself drained. Physically obviously, especially once they get to the point where they can't sleep for more than twenty minutes before the babe steps on their bladder, and they waddle around like a rhonetops." She chuckled and Veliry couldn't help but smile too. Though she wasn't looking forward to that part of the pregnancy. "But sometimes it's magical too." The healer continued. "Typically that will happen if the unborn child has some kind of.... well... I don't mean to worry you... but if they're sickly, or have a malformation. The magic floods into them, just like it does with our normal bodies, and attempts to fix the damage before it can set in permanently. Am I making sense?"

The thoughts of the developmental struggles Joey, the father, had gone through his entire life, and how they were a combination of unlucky genetics and brain chemistry, ran through her mind.

And suddenly she worried that their child might have to struggle through similar hardships, and hoped that the magic focusing on the unborn child would right the issue before it was born.

"You are." She said as she looked down at her stomach, which still hadn't grown, and likely wouldn't for another month or so.

"I wouldn't worry about it." The healer said with another congenial pat of her hand. "As long as the magical drain doesn't cut off unexpectedly... or increase dramatically AND unexpectedly.... I wouldn't worry about it. In the mean time, keep training, keep trying to grow your reserves. That will only help. And let us know if anything changes.

"I will." Veliry said with a smile that wasn't 100% authentic. "Say. Is Nurse Choi on shift today? I'd like to give her the.... um... good?... news."

The healer smiled. "She should have clocked in only a few minutes ago. Let's see if we can track her down and let her know how her grandson is developing."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11wx56u/wait_is_this_just_gate_332/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (330/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11sa472/wait_is_this_just_gate_329/)

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James sighed. "Fine." He said as he looked around. "I accept."

"Witnessed?" The dwarf asked.

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She felt a tug from her shield as it attempted to ward off another projectile, but it was still being buffeted by the debris and wind magic. She'd gotten used to its pull though, and dove over one of the stone columns that had been brought down well before the current fight, and rolled underneath a second magically flying dagger.

Two down. She thought as she rapidly rolled back to her feet, using the pull of her shield as an impromptu axis of rotation as she did, then she flipped up in a sideways somersault as the third dagger arced in from above and buried itself in the sand where she'd just been standing.

Three! One more.

Her shield pulled up and to the side and she let it guide itself as her sword arm moved to take its place. Her sword's blade bisected a rock that was flying towards her just as two of the fingers gripping it loosened and pointed at the centaur that was her opponent. A blast of fire, hot and pinpointed into a beam, shot through the blast of wind and rock and struck out at the dagger dancing mage. At the same moment there was a loud clang as her shield deflected the last of the enchanted daggers.

She landed from the airborne spin, and was on the verge of rushing in to go for a hit, when the announcer spoke.

"YANTAS!" The elderly elf woman said from her spot above the pit. "PETRAVIUS!" And another white flag moved to Amina's side. She only needed two more for the match to be over. She'd already won, but the extra points would put her higher up in the tournament brackets.

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"You alright to continue?" She asked, partly mocking, but also legitimately concerned. She hadn't actually been aiming for their leg, simply trying to force them to trip up or slow down. So it had been a hot spell compared to most she'd sent at them.

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"Fine." She said in a thick accent that reminded Amina of some of the zealots to the south of Petravus. Then she looked up at the announcer and nodded. Amina did the same.

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The upside, as far as Amina was concerned as she began running forward, was that she would only have to defend from one concentrated attack from the blades, as opposed to four seemingly random ones.

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Four different speeds and angles that Amina would have to defend from all at once, while also avoiding her opponent's magical attacks.

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Amina dashed forward, her shield ahead of her to defend from the incoming wind, debris, and lightning that Gorna was throwing at her, and her sword hand pointing backwards and blasting out wind magic in a jet. It was a trick James had taught her that he used to stabilize his flying.

She used it to run faster.

Gorna leaped back as fast as she could, her eyes wide in surprise at the unexpected offensive rush. But her quadrupedal body wasn't good at going backwards, and she ended up stumbling a bit. She tried to regain her footing and dodge to the side, when Amina did something even more unexpected.

"MEET ME BLADE TO BLADE!"

The princess yelled, throat glowing, in a voice that, at this range, made the centaur lose focus on her spells and clamp her hands over her ears. Behind Amina the four daggers wavered in their pursuing flight, two of them even clattering into each other and being forced into different arcs as a result.

Gorna cringed from the audio onslaught, her eyes closing reflexively from the hit she knew was coming.

But it didn't. Instead, something heavy landed on her back.

She looked back to see Princess Amina sitting on her like she was a horse.

"YOU DISRESPECTFUL BI-"

"Heads up." Amina said as she pointed in front of Gorna. "Incoming."

Then the realization hit Gorna.

She turned back just in time for two of her own daggers to slam into her chest plate, causing the magical device there to glow blue.

"YANTAS!" The announcer exclaimed. "PETRAVIUS!" And the second to last flag went to Amina's side.

"Thank you horsey." Amina said with a devious smile as she hopped off of Gorna's back and skipped over to her side of the pit.

"I OUGHT TO KILL YOU!" Gorna said venomously.

"Do try." Amina said. "Maybe it'll actually get you a point."

The two of them signaled their readiness again.

The flag dropped, and Gorna the Dagger Dancer unleashed her fiercest onslaught of the tournament.

Her four daggers once again blurred out of their sheathes and into the air. But instead of arcing out to the side, they came straight for Amina.

The largest difference however, was that instead of using her magic to attack Amina directly, Gorna used her wind magic with both hands to speed up her daggers, in much the same way that Amina had just used wind magic to speed up her charge only moments before.

The first of the enchanted blades slammed into Amina's shield like a hammer strike from an orc, and she found herself pushed back ever so slightly as the blade rebounded away. She didn't have time to track it however, as the second one met her shield only a split second after. What was worse was that the excess wind magic that was bolstering the projectiles was splashing against her shield like a non stop tidal wave.

She quickly found herself being pushed back against her will as her feet slid in the somewhat loose sand.

Well now. She thought as she focused on trying to track the arcing blades, which were still moving faster than before. *It would appear that I legitimately struck a nerve there.*

A third hammer blow from one of the daggers and her sword arm lashed out as she deflected the first blade, which had already returned for its second strike.

Her blade rung nearly as loudly as her shield had, just in time for the fourth dagger to hit it too. Then, despite her hand stinging from the impact, she had to spun underneath her shield and deflect the second dagger on its second strike.

I might have messed up by angering her. She thought as her shield struggled between wanting to defend against multiple rapid speed attacks.

wind enhanced, enchanted, controlled, daggers began hammering at her from all sides. It was all she could do to keep her sword and shield between them, and unlike James her sword wasn't enchanted. She could see the edges getting nicked and battered with each successful block. She started to augment the blade's defense by alternating it with blasts of wind jets from her fingers. On both hands when possible.

And to her surprise, Gorna began to move in.

"YOU DARE TO RIDE ME!?!?" She asked as her hands moved in front of her in slashing arcs as they manipulated the dancing blades like puppet strings. "AGAINST MY WILL!?!?!"

Amina was spinning like a child's top across the pit, shield moving mostly of its own volition as her sword blurred around her, and jets of high pressure wind lashed out in pin point strikes against the eager weapons.

"I WILL CRUSH YOU BENEATH MY HOOVES!" Gorna yelled.

As Amina neared one of the wooden columns in the arena, she improvised. Her left leg lashed out and struck the wood with the metal of her greaves leading. She wasn't as insanely strong as James, and especially not Vickers. But she was still superhuman compared to (pre-magic) Earth standards. That coupled with unknowingly slipping into a lesser form of the battle rage she'd entered in the desert, and the wood shattered like it was made of porcelain.

Amina made one last dodge of a dagger as the column fell, and threw her sword at Gorna to try and buy herself a moment. She also launched her shield up above her in a spin, sending it in the direction that it had been trying to go, and letting it guide itself somewhat on an intercept with the next strike.

As the numerous projectiles clashed against eachother, and as Gorna leapt aside to dodge the flying, Amina caught the falling wooden column with both hands and quickly heaved it overhead. She engaged her voice of authority again, even louder this time.

"CATCH!"

She yelled as she threw the entire nine feet or so of solid wood at Gorna lengthwise. The centaur's eyes once again went wide at the sight of the massive projectile. It was flying fast, but it's arc wasn't good, and it was flying low, towards her legs. She made to leap over the mass of wood.

But Amina hadn't stayed still to watch the column fly toward its target. She couldn't there were still, despite her distractions, daggers flying through the air much faster than they should have been.

Once again she charged.

Gorna realized her mistake just in time to pay for it. She cleared the flying column easily enough.

Then Amina's armored forearm slammed into her neck in a flying clothesline attack as she too flew through the air right behind the massive projectile.

Gorna, despite outweighing the princess by at least a thousand pounds if not more, found herself slammed onto her back in brutal fashion as the princess crashed down on top of her. Then she watched as the princess was slammed into the wall by her still flying daggers, which crashed into her back even as the announcer yelled out her victory.

"YANTAS! PETRAVIUS!" The announcer exclaimed to the roar of the crowd as Gorna attempted to redirect the last few daggers. She barely succeeded as the princess staggered and rolled out of their way before the last two redirected to the wall a few yards away.

Gorna was still mad. But she had lost fair and square. The extra attacks, while satisfying, wouldn't change that.

To her surprise, and despite what had to have been a punishing blow to the back, the princess held her hand out to Gorna.

Gorna stared at it awkwardly. Then accepted it and used the Princesses strength to help roll herself over and onto her legs.

"Now that's the fight I wanted to have from the beginning." Amina said with a smile. "Where was that in the three previous magic rounds?"

Gorna huffed in exasperation.

"I was hoping... to save it for the later rounds of the tournament." She admitted testily.

"Shouldn't have." Amina said easily. "I don't know if I would have won against you if I'd had to endure FOUR rounds of fighting like that." She stretched her back a bit as she rubbed it. "Might not have survived one. That hit hurt like hell."

"You rode me." Gorna hissed through clenched teeth.

"Yeah. Sorry about that." Amina said. "And the horsey comment. I know it's a bit of a touchy subject with your people. But I needed to get you riled up. I'd never do that anywhere but in a tournament like this."

"Hey babe!" James yelled from the nearby railing. "Great fight!"

Amina beamed up at him.

"You defeated me in battle." Gorna said, drawing Amina's attention back to her. "And you RODE me."

"Oh shit." Amina said as she realized what the defeated centaur was getting at. "Oh no."

"She seems mad." James said. "Your banter game is really improving hon." He said as he leaned against the railing with a huge grin on his face. "I'm finally teaching you for a change."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11u5hgy/wait_is_this_just_gate_331/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (330/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11sa1p2/wait_is_this_just_gate_329/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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The flag dropped, and Gorna the Dagger Dancer unleashed her fiercest onslaught of the tournament.

Her four daggers once again blurred out of their sheathes and into the air. But instead of arcing out to the side, they came straight for Amina.

The largest difference however, was that instead of using her magic to attack Amina directly, Gorna used her wind magic with both hands to speed up her daggers, in much the same way that Amina had just used wind magic to speed up her charge only moments before.

The first of the enchanted blades slammed into Amina's shield like a hammer strike from an orc, and she found herself pushed back ever so slightly as the blade rebounded away. She didn't have time to track it however, as the second one met her shield only a split second after. What was worse was that the excess wind magic that was bolstering the projectiles was splashing against her shield like a non stop tidal wave.

She quickly found herself being pushed back against her will as her feet slid in the somewhat loose sand.

Well now. She thought as she focused on trying to track the arcing blades, which were still moving faster than before. *It would appear that I legitimately struck a nerve there.*

A third hammer blow from one of the daggers and her sword arm lashed out as she deflected the first blade, which had already returned for its second strike.

Her blade rung nearly as loudly as her shield had, just in time for the fourth dagger to hit it too. Then, despite her hand stinging from the impact, she had to spin underneath her shield and deflect the second dagger on its second strike.

I might have messed up by angering her. She thought as her shield struggled between wanting to defend against multiple rapid speed attacks.

Wind enhanced, enchanted, controlled, daggers began hammering at her from all sides. It was all she could do to keep her sword and shield between them, and unlike James her sword wasn't enchanted. She could see the edges getting nicked and battered with each successful block. She started to augment the blade's defense by alternating it with blasts of wind jets from her fingers. On both hands when possible.

And to her surprise, Gorna began to move in.

"YOU DARE TO RIDE ME!?!?" She asked as her hands moved in front of her in slashing arcs as they manipulated the dancing blades like puppet strings. "AGAINST MY WILL!?!?!"

Amina was spinning like a child's top across the pit, shield moving mostly of its own volition as her sword blurred around her, and jets of high pressure wind lashed out in pin point strikes against the eager weapons.

"I WILL CRUSH YOU BENEATH MY HOOVES!" Gorna yelled.

As Amina neared one of the wooden columns in the arena, she improvised. Her left leg lashed out and struck the wood with the metal of her greaves leading. She wasn't as insanely strong as James, and especially not Vickers. But she was still superhuman compared to (pre-magic) Earth standards. That coupled with unknowingly slipping into a lesser form of the battle rage she'd entered in the desert, and the wood shattered like it was made of porcelain.

Amina made one last dodge of a dagger as the column fell, and threw her sword at Gorna to try and buy herself a moment. She also launched her shield up above her in a spin, sending it in the direction that it had been trying to go, and letting it guide itself somewhat on an intercept with the next strike.

As the numerous projectiles clashed against eachother, and as Gorna leapt aside to dodge the flying sword, Amina caught the falling wooden column with both hands and quickly heaved it overhead. She engaged her voice of authority again, even louder this time.

"CATCH!"

She yelled as she threw the entire nine feet or so of solid wood at Gorna lengthwise. The centaur's eyes once again went wide at the sight of the massive projectile. It was flying fast, but it's arc wasn't good, and it was flying low, towards her legs. She made to leap over the mass of wood.

But Amina hadn't stayed still to watch the column fly toward its target. She couldn't there were still, despite her distractions, daggers flying through the air much faster than they should have been.

Once again she charged.

Gorna realized her mistake just in time to pay for it. She cleared the flying column easily enough.

Then Amina's armored forearm slammed into her neck in a flying clothesline attack as she too flew through the air right behind the massive projectile.

Gorna, despite outweighing the princess by at least a thousand pounds if not more, found herself slammed onto her back in brutal fashion as the princess crashed down on top of her. Then she watched as the princess was slammed into the wall by her still flying daggers, which crashed into her back even as the announcer yelled out her victory.

"YANTAS! PETRAVIUS!" The announcer exclaimed to the roar of the crowd as Gorna attempted to redirect the last few daggers. She barely succeeded as the princess staggered and rolled out of their way before the last two redirected to the wall a few yards away.

Gorna was still mad. But she had lost fair and square. The extra attacks, while satisfying, wouldn't change that.

To her surprise, and despite what had to have been a punishing blow to the back, the princess held her hand out to Gorna.

Gorna stared at it awkwardly. Then accepted it and used the Princesses strength to help roll herself over and onto her legs.

"Now that's the fight I wanted to have from the beginning." Amina said with a smile. "Where was that in the three previous magic rounds?"

Gorna huffed in exasperation.

"I was hoping... to save it for the later rounds of the tournament." She admitted testily.

"Shouldn't have." Amina said easily. "I don't know if I would have won against you if I'd had to endure FOUR rounds of fighting like that." She stretched her back a bit as she rubbed it. "Might not have survived one. That hit hurt like hell."

"You rode me." Gorna hissed through clenched teeth.

"Yeah. Sorry about that." Amina said. "And the horsey comment. I know it's a bit of a touchy subject with your people. But I needed to get you riled up. I'd never do that anywhere but in a tournament like this."

"Hey babe!" James yelled from the nearby railing. "Great fight!"

Amina beamed up at him.

"You defeated me in battle." Gorna said, drawing Amina's attention back to her. "And you RODE me."

"Oh shit." Amina said as she realized what the defeated centaur was getting at. "Oh no."

"She seems mad." James said. "Your banter game is really improving hon." He said as he leaned against the railing with a huge grin on his face. "I'm finally teaching you for a change."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11u5ez9/wait_is_this_just_gate_331/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (329/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11qnehq/wait_is_this_just_gate_328/)

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Suddenly the entire arena seemed to silence, and James felt magic flood the area as some kind of shimmer snapped into place around the pit that he and the summoner had been fighting in. His other hand snapped up as his hand and eyes darted around with his .45, looking for whoever had put the new spell in place unexpectedly. It definitely hadn't been Vorea.

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his hands in the way he did. James wasn't currently wearing his medallion, and so couldn't understand him.

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Then he walked out of the arena, crunching over the shattered slag that had once been a horde of blood sand zombies, and the similarly destroyed form of his dead friend's champion body.

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She was conflicted. On the one hand James had... well, not overreacted. She couldn't call it that. But that had definitely not been a healthy response. Especially for Vorea.

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"She doesn't have a lot of time left." Vickers said grimly. Then he pulled up one of the chairs and sat in it. "Look. I aint gonna lie to you tin can. Even if you DO go through with this. It'll probably kill you. And even if it doesn't kill you. It'll probably drive you insane and I... will have to kill you. Or a member of the were-folk's guard will because you'll lose your mind and become a rabid monster."

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"Really?" He wondered.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (329/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11qncjv/wait_is_this_just_gate_328/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (328/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11o5f8g/wait_is_this_just_gate_327/)

Writer's note: In which James loses his chill.

Also, the mechanics of what's happening will be explained in better detail next chapter.

Vorea = FA&FO

Enjoy.

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James stood undisturbed in the ring.

This was in stark contrast to the crowd and the people in the arena's control box, a few casters maintaining shields for the fans, the announcer, and a few other VIP's mainly.

It was also clearly unnerving his opponent, Vorea the Summoner, who was a champion of this very tournament several times over.

The two of them drew in power and began focusing it on their preferred flavors of magic.

James was gathering in his for his explosive flight style, and also to keep his sword and chain moving. Whether Vorea could tell that that was what it was for or not, James was unsure. But it was very obvious what Vorea's magic was.

James had experienced the aura of dread that necromancy would fill an area with before. When the summoner had first began drawing in power he'd had the moment of fear that he'd felt on both of those occasions. His sword had begun to jump and buck like an animal at the dark energy, and James had attached it to his chain. He'd also felt something itching in his mind. It had felt familiar, though he couldn't place where he'd felt that before.

He hadn't used the sword like that in his previous match. Nor had he used his explosions. Amina had warned him to keep his secrets for as long as he could in the tournament, not that she'd needed to. But against a reigning champion and sanctioned necromancer, James figured now would be a good time.

James looked over at the announcer, who was holding the red flag that marked the first of the magical rounds of the fight. The starting flag and one more white flag were on James's side of the box, and one white one was on Vorea's. It hadn't surprised James that he'd outshone the man in melee combat, at least in games he'd played summoners were back field characters, and he had a feeling that Vorea was like that too.

James's eyes glowed a bright gold as the flag slowly began to drop.

He saw a series of blood red, semi-skeletal, forms begin to rise out of the sand of the arena. They seemed to be made of the very arena sand itself.

He didn't give them, or their creator, time to make their move.

BOOM!

In the blink of an eye James obliterated the ground beneath his feet, sending sand and newly formed glass, flying back and behind him as he

rocketed forward. His sword and chain swirled around him like the blades of an auger as he flew, battering and slicing the undead forms of what he assumed were former arena contestants as he flew.

Then he was within a foot of the necromancy summoner and his wolf hand slammed into the man's chest armor in an open palm slam. Before it did he had a moment to see the look of startled fear on Vorea's face as he realized what had happened. Then he was flying back to slam into the wall behind him in a heap.

Despite the impact Vorea fell from the wall to the ground and didn't fall. Instead he landed on his feet and charged at James.

This time it was James's fault to be surprised.

Instead of seeing the blue glow of Vorea's strike sensor, he saw the blood red glow of his brand of necromancy.

And for just a moment James saw the form of someone he'd never expected to see again.

Instead of Vorea moving toward him in a rage, James saw Gixelle.

She was made of the same glowing red sand as the "people" he'd destroyed mid-flight, and she was standing where Vorea was. But there was no mistaking the massive, incredibly muscular, sword wielding old woman.

Vorea's face and feet were exposed where they emerged from her sand based form as she sprinted at James. But it was her.

She even had the enraged expression he'd seen on her face any time she'd been fighting.

He only had a moment to feel rage himself before she was in his space, having taken advantage of his confusion to close the twenty yards or so in bounds.

So that's what my blood was for. He realized. *Amina thought it was so his summons would target me. But I don't think she knew that it would do that like this.*

He didn't have time to think any harder about it than that as Gixelle's massive sword, made of sand but he imagined still sharp enough to kill, swung at him in what would have been a blur if he hadn't been using his magic.

James leapt and ducked at the same time, dodging the swipe as he made distance.

He should have known better.

Instead of flying back into open space, he instead stumbled into a gaggle of grasping hands and swinging weapons.

Vorea had used the distraction of Gixelle to summon more sand zombies and move them in to mob him.

James's chest lit up blue only a split second later as he felt himself get battered for a moment.

And then, as soon as they'd done that, they let up. James looked around in confusion and saw the summons melting back as one. They moved like some kind of hive-mind from a movie.

"YANTAS!" The announcer yelled as they moved the flag over to Vorea's side. "VOREA!"

And the zombies stayed in the arena.

He looked at them in concern for a moment as he remembered the rules he'd been told.

"Summons can stay in the arena for as long as their summoner can maintain their forms." He muttered to himself. "So long as they undergo no changes in number or ability between rounds."

He nodded as he chewed on his lip.

"Alright." He said as he stepped back the prescribed distance. "Fair enough. The nuclear option it is then."

When he got there, before he signaled his readiness, he pointed a finger at Vorea, who was still piloting the Gixelle form.

"Is that her soul?" He asked. "Or just an image you pulled from my mind?"

The necromancer smiled creepily and looked satisfied.

"Whichever one makes you angrier." He replied as the red sand, which was part of the Gixelle form's sternum, enclosed his face.

"Wrong answer." James said quietly.

Then he signaled the announcer.

The next white flag dropped and James began focusing on the air around him. The zombies, and Vorea, seemed to expect him to charge, and so waited a moment to react before beginning to move.

That was a mistake.

In the space of a few heartbeats James flooded the arena with oxygen. Namely the area immediately around him.

He looked over at the summoner, who had just begun moving in behind his mob of zombies, even as others began rising from the ground.

James let them get within spitting distance.

He'd made an explosion like this once before, in the desert when he'd seen a muck marcher on the verge of shooting at Amina.

But this time it wasn't a spur of the moment reflex. It was focused, and angry.

BOOOM!

This time he couldn't see the surprised look on Vorea's face. Or Gixelle's for that matter.

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"Ha." He laughed once as his eye twitched.

He dropped the handle of his chain and sword into the sand, causing them both to fall down and for his sword to clatter noisily on the bits of glass and rock there as it tried to move on its own. Then he reached to his belt and chest, drawing the pistol and revolver as the reformed zombies swarmed into him and the Not-Kela began bounding toward him.

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So she was surprised, and even more enraged than James, when she saw the blood red sand quickly shift and congeal into a form that still haunted her nightmares to this day.

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"JAMES!" She yelled as the flag dropped and her husband finally saw the massive wolf.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (328/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11o54p9/wait_is_this_just_gate_327/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: In which James loses his chill.

Also, the mechanics of what's happening will be explained in better detail next chapter.

Vorea = FA&FO

Enjoy.

\~

James stood undisturbed in the ring.

This was in stark contrast to the crowd and the people in the arena's control box, a few casters maintaining shields for the fans, the announcer, and a few other VIP's mainly.

It was also clearly unnerving his opponent, Vorea the Summoner, who was a champion of this very tournament several times over.

The two of them drew in power and began focusing it on their preferred flavors of magic.

James was gathering in his for his explosive flight style, and also to keep his sword and chain moving. Whether Vorea could tell that that was what it was for or not, James was unsure. But it was very obvious what Vorea's magic was.

James had experienced the aura of dread that necromancy would fill an area with before. When the summoner had first began drawing in power he'd had the moment of fear that he'd felt on both of those occasions. His sword had begun to jump and buck like an animal at the dark energy, and James had attached it to his chain. He'd also felt something itching in his mind. It had felt familiar, though he couldn't place where he'd felt that before.

He hadn't used the sword like that in his previous match. Nor had he used his explosions. Amina had warned him to keep his secrets for as long as he could in the tournament, not that she'd needed to. But against a reigning champion and sanctioned necromancer, James figured now would be a good time.

James looked over at the announcer, who was holding the red flag that marked the first of the magical rounds of the fight. The starting flag and one more white flag were on James's side of the box, and one white one was on Vorea's. It hadn't surprised James that he'd outshone the man in melee combat, at least in games he'd played summoners were back field characters, and he had a feeling that Vorea was like that too.

James's eyes glowed a bright gold as the flag slowly began to drop.

He saw a series of blood red, semi-skeletal, forms begin to rise out of the sand of the arena. They seemed to be made of the very arena sand itself.

He didn't give them, or their creator, time to make their move.

BOOM!

In the blink of an eye James obliterated the ground beneath his feet, sending sand and newly formed glass, flying back and behind him as he rocketed forward. His sword and chain swirled around him like the blades of an auger as he flew, battering and slicing the undead forms of what he assumed were former arena contestants as he flew.

Then he was within a foot of the necromancy summoner and his wolf hand slammed into the man's chest armor in an open palm slam. Before it did he had a moment to see the look of startled fear on Vorea's face as he realized what had happened. Then he was flying back to slam into the wall behind him in a heap.

Despite the impact Vorea fell from the wall to the ground and didn't fall. Instead he landed on his feet and charged at James.

This time it was James's fault to be surprised.

Instead of seeing the blue glow of Vorea's strike sensor, he saw the blood red glow of his brand of necromancy.

And for just a moment James saw the form of someone he'd never expected to see again.

Instead of Vorea moving toward him in a rage, James saw Gixelle.

She was made of the same glowing red sand as the "people" he'd destroyed mid-flight, and she was standing where Vorea was. But there was no mistaking the massive, incredibly muscular, sword wielding old woman.

Vorea's face and feet were exposed where they emerged from her sand based form as she sprinted at James. But it was her.

She even had the enraged expression he'd seen on her face any time she'd been fighting.

He only had a moment to feel rage himself before she was in his space, having taken advantage of his confusion to close the twenty yards or so in bounds.

So that's what my blood was for. He realized. *Amina thought it was so his summons would target me. But I don't think she knew that it would do that like this.*

He didn't have time to think any harder about it than that as Gixelle's massive sword, made of sand but he imagined still sharp enough to kill, swung at him in what would have been a blur if he hadn't been using his magic.

James leapt and ducked at the same time, dodging the swipe as he made distance.

He should have known better.

Instead of flying back into open space, he instead stumbled into a gaggle of grasping hands and swinging weapons.

Vorea had used the distraction of Gixelle to summon more sand zombies and move them in to mob him.

James's chest lit up blue only a split second later as he felt himself get battered for a moment.

And then, as soon as they'd done that, they let up. James looked around in confusion and saw the summons melting back as one. They moved like some kind of hive-mind from a movie.

"YANTAS!" The announcer yelled as they moved the flag over to Vorea's side. "VOREA!"

And the zombies stayed in the arena.

He looked at them in concern for a moment as he remembered the rules he'd been told.

"Summons can stay in the arena for as long as their summoner can maintain their forms." He muttered to himself. "So long as they undergo no changes in number or ability between rounds."

He nodded as he chewed on his lip.

"Alright." He said as he stepped back the prescribed distance. "Fair enough. The nuclear option it is then."

When he got there, before he signaled his readiness, he pointed a finger at Vorea, who was still piloting the Gixelle form.

"Is that her soul?" He asked. "Or just an image you pulled from my mind?"

The necromancer smiled creepily and looked satisfied.

"Whichever one makes you angrier." He replied as the red sand, which was part of the Gixelle form's sternum, enclosed his face.

"Wrong answer." James said quietly.

Then he signaled the announcer.

The next white flag dropped and James began focusing on the air around him. The zombies, and Vorea, seemed to expect him to charge, and so waited a moment to react before beginning to move.

That was a mistake.

In the space of a few heartbeats James flooded the arena with oxygen. Namely the area immediately around him.

He looked over at the summoner, who had just begun moving in behind his mob of zombies, even as others began rising from the ground.

James let them get within spitting distance.

He'd made an explosion like this once before, in the desert when he'd seen a muck marcher on the verge of shooting at Amina.

But this time it wasn't a spur of the moment reflex. It was focused, and angry.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (327/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11me665/wait_is_this_just_gate_326/)

Writer's note: Yeah. It's a tournament arc. This has always been anime cliches. And J&A said that they wanted to take part in one that was going on.

Enjoy.

\~

James stood in the sand with his feet in a fighting stance. In his right hand was the magical sword that he'd had to reforge and re-enchant several months earlier. In his right was the handle of the enchanted chain that had been paired with it. The chain spun in slow lazy circles behind him, not moving with the air magic that he normally used with it. For now he just wanted it to look like a normal chain.

I'm at a bit of a disadvantage here. He thought as he looked across the arena's fighting pit at his opponent. *I'm gonna have to ask Amina what the fuck this lady is later.*

Across from him stood, or rather slithered, a woman with four arms and the body of a serpent. He'd seen a handful of them in the capital, but had never interacted with one until today. And he'd never seen one armed before.

This one was simultaneously wielding a crossbow AND two weapons that were shaped like question marks and reminded him of ancient Egyptian weapons. She also had a series of metal plates running down her back almost the entire way down her reptilian tail, and a matching breastplate. Her looked like a roman centurion helm, but with an extra set of eye slits..... for her extra set of eyes.

I wonder if she's the kind of thing Medusa was? He wondered as he listened to the tournament announcer speak to the crowd. He couldn't understand the opulently dressed man, he'd left his medallion with his personal belongings to keep it safe. *Shit. Do I need to avoid eye contact?*

"TAEL'ON MADORESSI!" The announcer yelled. The snake woman raised her crossbow over her head and screamed. James was vaguely reminded of Tuskan Raiders. He stifled a chuckle and the snake woman glared at him as the crowd cheered.

Then the announcer switched over to Petravian to introduced James.

"AND FROM ACROSS THE SEA IN PETRAVIUS!" He yelled in a thickly accented voice. "THE CAPTAIN JAMES CHOI!"

James held his sword up for a moment and waved to a significantly quieter crowd.

Then the announcer held up a large pole with the Vatrian Empire's symbol on it. He held it straight up and James listened for the Vatrian word that the tournament staff had told him marked the beginning of the fight.

"MADASH!" The announcer yelled as he dropped the Vatrian flag.

James moved bolted forward, his legs moving in a blur as he sprinted toward his opponent in a rush.

Remember. He told himself as he saw the snake woman's surprised expression as she raised the crossbow. *No magic until after the third flag.*

Even without his eye magic, James's reflexes were vastly improved over his first days in this world. And his quick draw competitions back on Earth had already made his reaction time a lot faster than most people.

He saw the crossbow aim for him, he estimated roughly for his chest. He saw the flare of enchantment on the end of its body as it fired its bolt, activating the magic in it as it did.

Just like I thought, an arbalestier. Or at least one of their weapons.

James initiated a baseball slide underneath the bolt. He felt a sizzling of magical energy fly past as the skin that wasn't protected by his own helmet felt intense heat fly past it.

But the small, enchanted, broach on his chest plate stayed dark. No hit.

The momentary distraction, quick as it was, as he checked was enough for the snake woman's upper arms to reload the magical crossbow.

James kicked and spun as he leapt up out of the slide and into the air.

He smiled as he saw his opponent's shocked expression and anger at the sudden redirection.

His sword flashed out and lightly smacked her helmet as he flew over her. There was a dull ringing noise from it as she instinctively jumped to the side. James landed some ten yards or so past her and stood up with a smile as she spun to face him. He tapped his sword hand at the device on his chest and then pointed at her.

She glared as she looked down and saw the bright blue light glowing from it.

"DARA!" The announcer yelled. "HIT!" He moved the flag from the beginning of the match onto the side and into a small stand. Then he retrieved another one, this one unadorned and held it up.

James and his opponent both stood and watched each other. The reptilian spat some kind of curse in some language that was neither Petravian or Vatrian. Then she did something to her crossbow and it separated into two smaller crossbows. Each one was still roughly the size of a sub machine gun, and he had no idea how she planned on reloading them. But he had a feeling he was going to find out.

"Fast thing." She said in a hiss. "Not happen twice. Tael'On will pin and crush."

"Hey." James replied. "No flirting allowed. You'll make my new wife angry."

The snake woman, Tael'On apparently, was about to retort when the announcer signaled for them to begin again.

The first shot of the crossbow came almost as soon as the man finished the word. James was faster though, and dashed to the side. He whipped the sand up with his chain as he did, creating a cloud of the fine grit as he flew around the crossbow wielding enemy began to loose bolts at a clip that James thought impressive.

It was when one of them flew just in front of his helmet's visor, close enough that one of its feathers bristled against his nose-guard, that James realized she was catching up to his rapid movements.

He made a mistake, his reflexes causing him to instinctively skid to a halt, and an arrow slammed into his shoulder plate. Despite being only a foot or so long, the arrow slammed into him like a sledgehammer. He rolled as it knocked him off his feet and rapidly leapt back up into a fighting stance. But the blue glow of the magical device on his chest made him stop.

She'd been letting him think he'd been faster than her aim.

He rose up fully as the announcer moved the flag over to the stand on his other side, evening their scores.

James pulled the blunted bolt from the ice it had flash frozen onto his shoulder and tossed it aside. Then a crack of his sword's pommel broke the coating of ice off.

"Nice." He said as he dusted the last few chips off with his hand. "But kitty hits harder when we train."

Tael'On stopped her chittering laugh and tilted her head a bit at the statement.

Then the third flag dropped.

This time James didn't run.

In fact he didn't so much as move from the position he'd been in.

Instead he let his sword do what it had been begging him to let it do the entire match. But he hadn't wanted to reveal its ability until he needed it, so he'd been resisting its pull.

Now he let it dance around him, tethered only by his arm, as the snake-like, dual wielding, arbalestier began unleashing a torrent of enchanted bolts.

And as his arm moved around in a blur, deflecting, blocking, and at times outright destroying, the rapidly flying projectiles, and drinking in the magical energy stored within them, James smiled.

His mouth broke into an almost manic grin as Tael'On recoiled at the display of enchantment enhanced defense.

She tried to increase her rate of fire, and as she did James began to advance.

When he got within twenty yards the thing he'd been waiting for finally happened. He'd been wondering just how many bolts she had for each of the small crossbows. Her two sets of arms had been a blur as she'd fired with the upper arms and rapidly reloaded with the lower ones. But as James crossed past one of the numerous wooden columns in the arena, a misfire occurred.

One of the lower arms, in her pressured haste, grabbed a bolt and somehow bungled the reload. Instead of firing the bolt at James, the crossbow's string flew beneath the projectile and launched it up into the air while also snapping its blunted tip off. In doing so it simultaneously primed the enchanted tip and severed itself.

The tip popped up for a second, then fell to the ground as Tael'On's eyes widened in surprised fear.

As the tip hit the ground, releasing a plume of smoke that must have been one of her last, and most desparate, rounds. James flew in with a charge.

The hand that had been wielding the offending crossbow threw it at the ground in anger and reached with its lower counterpart for the curved blade on that side. It didn't get free of its small leather scabbard before James's sword slammed into the large snake woman's chest plate, causing the device there to glow blue again.

Her hand clamped onto his throat by instinct and her tail began moving forward to attack him.

"TAEL'ON!" The announcer yelled. "BADEH NAH!"

"Point to me." James said with a grin as he struggled to breath. "You can put me down now."

She actually hissed at him, and James was mildly disturbed by the rows of long teeth within her mouth. They reminded him of Steve just a bit.

Then she lowered him down the few feet that she'd been holding him off the ground.

James walked back until he was once again at roughly the fifty foot mark. Then he nodded at the announcer.

The announcer nodded back, then looked at Tael'On with reproach.

She tossed her remaining crossbow aside and dropped the belt that held the two, mostly empty, quivers for them. Then she drew the two curved swords fully and nodded back.

The announcer moved the third flag to James's side. Then grabbed one that was red. The one that meant magic was allowed now.

His eyes began to glow gold as he imbued them with reflex enhancing vision.

Tael'On's right eye glowed with the same color, but her left one glowed green.

Nice. James thought. *I'm gonna have to try that later.*

He felt energy flooding the snake's side of the arena as she built it up in her empty hands, and once again he had to admit that, physically at least, she had a lot of advantages against him in a straight up fight.

But James wasn't about fair fights.

He kept swinging his chain around lazily, but built up the energy to start using wind magic to move it faster and more precisely.

The flag dropped, and as soon as it did a deluge of poisonous gas blasted right for James from the snake woman's hands as she charged in with her blades.

Poison gas from one hand, wind magic from the other to move it along. Nice. James thought. *But not a good match up.*

James's sword began moving in front of him like a blur, devouring the poisonous blast like it was nothing more than a refreshing drink of water.

Then James's chain swung forward like a whip, wing magic making it so fast even his enhanced vision saw it as a blur.

There was another loud ringing noise as it (ironically) snaked past his opponent's two swords and slammed into her chest like a fist, sending her crashing back on top of her own tail.

The light on her chest glowed blue again as she picked herself back up, and the red flag went to James's side.

When she looked at James this time there was honest confusion and panic on her face.

James had a feeling, that was proven correct shortly after, that she wasn't prepared for the kind of powers he was going to bring to bear.

Ten minutes later James walked into the fighter's waiting room, unbuckling his chest plate as he did.

Amina was already there, waiting for him, her sword resting comfortable against her leg as she reclined on one of the benches against the wall.

"You're already done?" He asked as he sat next to her with a fist bump that made their gauntlets rattle noisily. "How was your fight?"

"An orc who was far too slow to be a real contender." She said as she let him slide in next to her and placed her arm around him. "I was done nearly half an hour ago. You?"

"A four armed snake woman who was an arbalestier." He said proudly.

"Tael'On the poisoner?" She asked.

"You know her?" He asked as he slid his arm behind her and wrapped his wolf arm around her waist. He waved at a massive man with writhing tattoos who looked at them curiously.

"Not personally." She replied. "But she's won this tournament a few times." She seemed to think for a moment. "Did she try to send a jet of poison at you?" James nodded. "Oof. Not a good idea against your sword."

"No." He agreed. "No it was not."

"A bad match-up overall." She said. "Score?"

"Six to one." He said with a smile. "You?"

"Seven zero." She replied.

"Nice." He said as one of the tournament staff entered the waiting area.

"New match-ups!" The young elf announced. He pulled up a piece of parchment and pressed it to the board that had the tournaments bracket on it.

James, Amina, and all the other fighters got up from where they were resting and went over to it to see their new spots.

James and Amina were, by request, on opposite sides of the bracket.

"Arena two for me." She said after finding her name again. "Kragar Brightblade? A dwarf?"

"That's me princess." A short, but heavily armed, dwarven woman piped up. "Been a minute since I fought a Petravian. Much less a princess."

"Bring it on then." Amina said with a smile. James had been surprised at how amiable most of the fighters were when they weren't in the ring. Only a handful seemed to be playing any kind of villain role.

"I'm up against..... Vorea Snapcin?" James said as he read the name that was paired with his. "The..... summoner?"

"Oh?" Amina said. "That's a slightly better match for your skills." She added with a bit of concern.

"That's me... Hero." Said a sickly looking man in a bright green set of mages robes. Despite his somewhat menacing appearance he held out a hand.

James took it.

"Well." He said. "I look forward to our match. What kind of summoning do you do?"

Vorea shook his head as he smiled. The teeth in his mouth were a mish-mash of clean white human teeth, rotted brown teeth, and some of them seemed to be pointed and inhuman, and in various states of decay. He cringed a bit at the display.

Suddenly Amina was gripping his other arm.

Vorea broke the handshake, and as he did one of his fingernails, all of which were jagged and some broken, accidentally sliced James's hand.

"Ow!" He exclaimed at the injury. "What the hell man?" He asked as he wiped his hand on his pants. The cut wasn't big, but it did bleed a bit.

"Apologies." Vorea said as he slunk away. "See you in the pit."

"Dammit." Amina said.

"What?" James asked as he turned and saw her with a worried expression on her face.

"That was a setup." She said. "His summons will have a taste for you now."

"What?" He asked. He turned back to look for the mage, but he'd gotten out of sight fast. "What the hell does he summon? That's gotta be illegal."

Amina pulled his arm to inspect the injured hand.

"It falls into the category of 'pre-fight spell preparation'. The bastard." She said angrily. "It's one of the few loop holes, and one of the most disliked ones at that." Then she looked up at James. "And he summons the dead."

James's eyes widened at that. He'd experienced, albeit not in close proximity, the effect that necromancy had on people. Both times it had been used in the castle it had caused both of them to have sleepless nights.

"He's a necromancer?" He asked.

"One of the few in the world who hasn't been hunted down and killed. Mainly because he only ever uses his craft at the Emperor's request." Then she looked past James at the board. "Or for tournaments he's decided to enter. All of which he's won."

James pulled out his sword, which was subtly vibrating in it's scabbard.

"Well." He said with mild concern. "Let's hope for an upset."

"If anyone can do it, it's you." She said before kissing him on the cheek.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (327/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11me48q/wait_is_this_just_gate_326/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yeah. It's a tournament arc. This has always been anime cliches. And J&A said that they wanted to take part in one that was going on.

Enjoy.

\~

James stood in the sand with his feet in a fighting stance. In his right hand was the magical sword that he'd had to reforge and re-enchant several months earlier. In his right was the handle of the enchanted chain that had been paired with it. The chain spun in slow lazy circles behind him, not moving with the air magic that he normally used with it. For now he just wanted it to look like a normal chain.

I'm at a bit of a disadvantage here. He thought as he looked across the arena's fighting pit at his opponent. *I'm gonna have to ask Amina what the fuck this lady is later.*

Across from him stood, or rather slithered, a woman with four arms and the body of a serpent. He'd seen a handful of them in the capital, but had never interacted with one until today. And he'd never seen one armed before.

This one was simultaneously wielding a crossbow AND two weapons that were shaped like question marks and reminded him of ancient Egyptian weapons. She also had a series of metal plates running down her back almost the entire way down her reptilian tail, and a matching breastplate. Her looked like a roman centurion helm, but with an extra set of eye slits..... for her extra set of eyes.

I wonder if she's the kind of thing Medusa was? He wondered as he listened to the tournament announcer speak to the crowd. He couldn't understand the opulently dressed man, he'd left his medallion with his personal belongings to keep it safe. *Shit. Do I need to avoid eye contact?*

"TAEL'ON MADORESSI!" The announcer yelled. The snake woman raised her crossbow over her head and screamed. James was vaguely reminded of Tuskan Raiders. He stifled a chuckle and the snake woman glared at him as the crowd cheered.

Then the announcer switched over to Petravian to introduced James.

"AND FROM ACROSS THE SEA IN PETRAVIUS!" He yelled in a thickly accented voice. "THE CAPTAIN JAMES CHOI!"

James held his sword up for a moment and waved to a significantly quieter crowd.

Then the announcer held up a large pole with the Vatrian Empire's symbol on it. He held it straight up and James listened for the Vatrian word that the tournament staff had told him marked the beginning of the fight.

"MADASH!" The announcer yelled as he dropped the Vatrian flag.

James moved bolted forward, his legs moving in a blur as he sprinted toward his opponent in a rush.

Remember. He told himself as he saw the snake woman's surprised expression as she raised the crossbow. *No magic until after the third flag.*

Even without his eye magic, James's reflexes were vastly improved over his first days in this world. And his quick draw competitions back on Earth had already made his reaction time a lot faster than most people.

He saw the crossbow aim for him, he estimated roughly for his chest. He saw the flare of enchantment on the end of its body as it fired its bolt, activating the magic in it as it did.

Just like I thought, an arbalestier. Or at least one of their weapons.

James initiated a baseball slide underneath the bolt. He felt a sizzling of magical energy fly past as the skin that wasn't protected by his own helmet felt intense heat fly past it.

But the small, enchanted, broach on his chest plate stayed dark. No hit.

The momentary distraction, quick as it was, as he checked was enough for the snake woman's upper arms to reload the magical crossbow.

James kicked and spun as he leapt up out of the slide and into the air.

He smiled as he saw his opponent's shocked expression and anger at the sudden redirection.

His sword flashed out and lightly smacked her helmet as he flew over her. There was a dull ringing noise from it as she instinctively jumped to the side. James landed some ten yards or so past her and stood up with a smile as she spun to face him. He tapped his sword hand at the device on his chest and then pointed at her.

She glared as she looked down and saw the bright blue light glowing from it.

"DARA!" The announcer yelled. "HIT!" He moved the flag from the beginning of the match onto the side and into a small stand. Then he retrieved another one, this one unadorned and held it up.

James and his opponent both stood and watched each other. The reptilian spat some kind of curse in some language that was neither Petravian or Vatrian. Then she did something to her crossbow and it separated into two smaller crossbows. Each one was still roughly the size of a sub machine gun, and he had no idea how she planned on reloading them. But he had a feeling he was going to find out.

"Fast thing." She said in a hiss. "Not happen twice. Tael'On will pin and crush."

"Hey." James replied. "No flirting allowed. You'll make my new wife angry."

The snake woman, Tael'On apparently, was about to retort when the announcer signaled for them to begin again.

The first shot of the crossbow came almost as soon as the man finished the word. James was faster though, and dashed to the side. He whipped the sand up with his chain as he did, creating a cloud of the fine grit as he flew around the crossbow wielding enemy began to loose bolts at a clip that James thought impressive.

It was when one of them flew just in front of his helmet's visor, close enough that one of its feathers bristled against his nose-guard, that James realized she was catching up to his rapid movements.

He made a mistake, his reflexes causing him to instinctively skid to a halt, and an arrow slammed into his shoulder plate. Despite being only a foot or so long, the arrow slammed into him like a sledgehammer. He rolled as it knocked him off his feet and rapidly leapt back up into a fighting stance. But the blue glow of the magical device on his chest made him stop.

She'd been letting him think he'd been faster than her aim.

He rose up fully as the announcer moved the flag over to the stand on his other side, evening their scores.

James pulled the blunted bolt from the ice it had flash frozen onto his shoulder and tossed it aside. Then a crack of his sword's pommel broke the coating of ice off.

"Nice." He said as he dusted the last few chips off with his hand. "But kitty hits harder when we train."

Tael'On stopped her chittering laugh and tilted her head a bit at the statement.

Then the third flag dropped.

This time James didn't run.

In fact he didn't so much as move from the position he'd been in.

Instead he let his sword do what it had been begging him to let it do the entire match. But he hadn't wanted to reveal its ability until he needed it, so he'd been resisting its pull.

Now he let it dance around him, tethered only by his arm, as the snake-like, dual wielding, arbalestier began unleashing a torrent of enchanted bolts.

And as his arm moved around in a blur, deflecting, blocking, and at times outright destroying, the rapidly flying projectiles, and drinking in the magical energy stored within them, James smiled.

His mouth broke into an almost manic grin as Tael'On recoiled at the display of enchantment enhanced defense.

She tried to increase her rate of fire, and as she did James began to advance.

When he got within twenty yards the thing he'd been waiting for finally happened. He'd been wondering just how many bolts she had for each of the small crossbows. Her two sets of arms had been a blur as she'd fired with

the upper arms and rapidly reloaded with the lower ones. But as James crossed past one of the numerous wooden columns in the arena, a misfire occurred.

One of the lower arms, in her pressured haste, grabbed a bolt and somehow bungled the reload. Instead of firing the bolt at James, the crossbow's string flew beneath the projectile and launched it up into the air while also snapping its blunted tip off. In doing so it simultaneously primed the enchanted tip and severed itself.

The tip popped up for a second, then fell to the ground as Tael'On's eyes widened in surprised fear.

As the tip hit the ground, releasing a plume of smoke that must have been one of her last, and most desparate, rounds. James flew in with a charge.

The hand that had been wielding the offending crossbow threw it at the ground in anger and reached with its lower counterpart for the curved blade on that side. It didn't get free of its small leather scabbard before James's sword slammed into the large snake woman's chest plate, causing the device there to glow blue again.

Her hand clamped onto his throat by instinct and her tail began moving forward to attack him.

"TAEL'ON!" The announcer yelled. "BADEH NAH!"

"Point to me." James said with a grin as he struggled to breath. "You can put me down now."

She actually hissed at him, and James was mildly disturbed by the rows of long teeth within her mouth. They reminded him of Steve just a bit.

Then she lowered him down the few feet that she'd been holding him off the ground.

James walked back until he was once again at roughly the fifty foot mark. Then he nodded at the announcer.

The announcer nodded back, then looked at Tael'On with reproach.

She tossed her remaining crossbow aside and dropped the belt that held the two, mostly empty, quivers for them. Then she drew the two curved swords fully and nodded back.

The announcer moved the third flag to James's side. Then grabbed one that was red. The one that meant magic was allowed now.

His eyes began to glow gold as he imbued them with reflex enhancing vision.

Tael'On's right eye glowed with the same color, but her left one glowed green.

Nice. James thought. *I'm gonna have to try that later.*

He felt energy flooding the snake's side of the arena as she built it up in her empty hands, and once again he had to admit that, physically at least, she had a lot of advantages against him in a straight up fight.

But James wasn't about fair fights.

He kept swinging his chain around lazily, but built up the energy to start using wind magic to move it faster and more precisely.

The flag dropped, and as soon as it did a deluge of poisonous gas blasted right for James from the snake woman's hands as she charged in with her blades.

Poison gas from one hand, wind magic from the other to move it along. Nice. James thought. *But not a good match up.*

James's sword began moving in front of him like a blur, devouring the poisonous blast like it was nothing more than a refreshing drink of water.

Then James's chain swung forward like a whip, wing magic making it so fast even his enhanced vision saw it as a blur.

There was another loud ringing noise as it (ironically) snaked past his opponent's two swords and slammed into her chest like a fist, sending her crashing back on top of her own tail.

The light on her chest glowed blue again as she picked herself back up, and the red flag went to James's side.

When she looked at James this time there was honest confusion and panic on her face.

James had a feeling, that was proven correct shortly after, that she wasn't prepared for the kind of powers he was going to bring to bear.

Ten minutes later James walked into the fighter's waiting room, unbuckling his chest plate as he did.

Amina was already there, waiting for him, her sword resting comfortable against her leg as she reclined on one of the benches against the wall.

"You're already done?" He asked as he sat next to her with a fist bump that made their gauntlets rattle noisily. "How was your fight?"

"An orc who was far too slow to be a real contender." She said as she let him slide in next to her and placed her arm around him. "I was done nearly half an hour ago. You?"

"A four armed snake woman who was an arbalestier." He said proudly.

"Tael'On the poisoner?" She asked.

"You know her?" He asked as he slid his arm behind her and wrapped his wolf arm around her waist. He waved at a massive man with writhing tattoos who looked at them curiously.

"Not personally." She replied. "But she's won this tournament a few times." She seemed to think for a moment. "Did she try to send a jet of poison at you?" James nodded. "Oof. Not a good idea against your sword."

"No." He agreed. "No it was not."

"A bad match-up overall." She said. "Score?"

"Six to one." He said with a smile. "You?"

"Seven zero." She replied.

"Nice." He said as one of the tournament staff entered the waiting area.

"New match-ups!" The young elf announced. He pulled up a piece of parchment and pressed it to the board that had the tournaments bracket on it.

James, Amina, and all the other fighters got up from where they were resting and went over to it to see their new spots.

James and Amina were, by request, on opposite sides of the bracket.

"Arena two for me." She said after finding her name again. "Kragar Brightblade? A dwarf?"

"That's me princess." A short, but heavily armed, dwarven woman piped up. "Been a minute since I fought a Petravian. Much less a princess."

"Bring it on then." Amina said with a smile. James had been surprised at how amiable most of the fighters were when they weren't in the ring. Only a handful seemed to be playing any kind of villain role.

"I'm up against..... Vorea Snapcin?" James said as he read the name that was paired with his. "The..... summoner?"

"Oh?" Amina said. "That's a slightly better match for your skills." She added with a bit of concern.

"That's me... Hero." Said a sickly looking man in a bright green set of mages robes. Despite his somewhat menacing appearance he held out a hand.

James took it.

"Well." He said. "I look forward to our match. What kind of summoning do you do?"

Vorea shook his head as he smiled. The teeth in his mouth were a mish-mash of clean white human teeth, rotted brown teeth, and some of them

seemed to be pointed and inhuman, and in various states of decay. He cringed a bit at the display.

Suddenly Amina was gripping his other arm.

Vorea broke the handshake, and as he did one of his fingernails, all of which were jagged and some broken, accidentally sliced James's hand.

"Ow!" He exclaimed at the injury. "What the hell man?" He asked as he wiped his hand on his pants. The cut wasn't big, but it did bleed a bit.

"Apologies." Vorea said as he slunk away. "See you in the pit."

"Dammit." Amina said.

"What?" James asked as he turned and saw her with a worried expression on her face.

"That was a setup." She said. "His summons will have a taste for you now."

"What?" He asked. He turned back to look for the mage, but he'd gotten out of sight fast. "What the hell does he summon? That's gotta be illegal."

Amina pulled his arm to inspect the injured hand.

"It falls into the category of 'pre-fight spell preparation'. The bastard." She said angrily. "It's one of the few loop holes, and one of the most disliked ones at that." Then she looked up at James. "And he summons the dead."

James's eyes widened at that. He'd experienced, albeit not in close proximity, the effect that necromancy had on people. Both times it had been used in the castle it had caused both of them to have sleepless nights.

"He's a necromancer?" He asked.

"One of the few in the world who hasn't been hunted down and killed. Mainly because he only ever uses his craft at the Emperor's request." Then she looked past James at the board. "Or for tournaments he's decided to enter. All of which he's won."

James pulled out his sword, which was subtly vibrating in it's scabbard.

"Well." He said with mild concern. "Let's hope for an upset."

"If anyone can do it, it's you." She said before kissing him on the cheek.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (326/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11ldk66/wait_is_this_just_gate_325/)

Writer's note: [*James be like.*](https://imgflip.com/i/7dslxv)

Also, enjoy a little look into Vickers' day to day operation.

Enjoy.

\~

James stood up with a look of exasperation that was only mostly fake. As he did he whispered for Amina to follow his lead.

"Captain Choi. Princess Amina." Soleen said from behind the emperor. To her credit, her voice was convincingly stern as she relayed the emperor's signs. "We congratulate you on your marriage and wish you great fortune together. However we may not tolerate blasphemy against the gods of this world. As is custom you are granted a stay of five days as our guests. Though you may end that stay early at your own discretion." She paused as the emperor stood up and made a show of glaring at James. "During that time the emperor demands that no further blaspheming occur or he would have no choice but to bring the wrath of the guard down upon you." She gestured toward the door. "Please enjoy your time here in Vatria, and please do not return to our country until you have gained an appropriate level of piety."

Then, as Commander Tyrius turned to open the door, the Vateris signed quickly to James. \[Ferrick and I have agents we can send messages through.\] He looked as though he was about to sign more when Tyrius finished opening the massive door and turned back around.

"Please retrieve your weapon and return to your room." Soleen finished for the Emperor.

James bowed a little, and Amina joined him.

"Thank you for your mercy and understanding your majesty." James said with a subtle wink. "I apologize for any offense," He looked back at Tyrius, who had never stopped staring at him with a hateful expression since his little test. "and for any accidental fear I may have induced in your guards."

\[Good luck on your "endeavor".\] The Emperor signed.

"I appreciate the apology." Soleen lied on his behalf.

James simply nodded. Then he turned on his heel and approached the large half orc commander. He stuck his hand out expectantly.

Tyrius glared at him with a rage so intense that James was surprised there wasn't steam coming out of his ears.

"Give the hero his weapon Commander." Soleen said.

"Yes.... sire." Tyrius said through clenched teeth as he pulled the pistol, magazine, and lone bullet out of a pouch on his belt and handed it roughly to James. James grabbed the pistol. And as if he was trying to be a cliche, Tyrius held onto it, forcing James to pull harder. But, larger or not, James was the stronger one here. Once the pistol was in his hands he popped the round back in the magazine, and loaded it before switching the safety on and tucking it back under his armor.

He turned and nodded to Emperor Vateris, "Good evening your holiness." He said as he stepped out the door, and past the small army of guards that were still in formation outside the doors from earlier.

"James." Amina said after having also bowed and said her farewell, then hustling for a few steps to catch up. "That was hands down the worst diplomatic meeting I've ever borne witness to. And I didn't even get to take part in the majority of it. What the hell just happened?"

James smiled as he slid his hand around her waist and bumped his hip into hers.

"First off." He said. "Despite everyone treating me to the contrary, I'm NOT... a diplomat." He peeked over his shoulder at the throng of guards who had turned to watch the two of them depart. Tyrius towered over most of them and continued to glare. He waved sarcastically. "Secondly. I think I just made a friend." Then he put on a cheesy grin. "Maybe two if you count the Commander. I think he was trying to flirt with me." He joked.

Amina just stared at him like the madman that he occasionally, and currently, was.

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"Alright everyone up!" Vickers yelled. "Time for squats!"

The last dozen or so military personnel who were classified as prisoners groaned as they got up off of their backs and took up position for the exercise.

"Hey Chief!" Batista yelled as he jogged over. He was wearing a set of workout clothes that he had had made by the castle tailors, as well as a compression vest around his abdomen.

Vickers nodded at the former soldier. "Batista." He said as he lowered down and held his arms out in front of him. The prisoners followed suit. "What's up?"

"Passed the King on my way outside." Batty said as he jogged in place for a minute. "Said to let you know that he got a response to whatever you two had talked about. Said to have you talk to him whenever you got a chance."

"Thanks. I'll talk to him in a bit." Vickers said as he began another squat. Batty mocked a salute, then resumed his morning run.

Vickers had come to respect the younger man over the past few weeks. He hadn't had much opportunity to deal with him before Choi had left for his honeymoon. But since then the two of them had gotten to know each other a bit better. Batista acted as a sort of casual go-between for the prisoners and the Ambassador's staff. His position as neither active duty or attached personnel, having effectively been disavowed and granted asylum, allowed him a bit more freedom. And Vickers thought he was startlingly disciplined for someone who no longer needed to be.

Additionally, the two of them had started hustling the royal soldiers at darts, which Batista had apparently introduced them to. Batista had really good grouping, and while Vicker's wasn't so good at getting any of the outer rings, he was reliably able to hit the bullseye racking up points quickly whenever they played.

Half an hour later Vickers watched as the P.O.W.s slowly ambled from the dungeon bathing rooms to their cells.

In his opinion they had it easy for Prisoners. They were, with the exception of Nguyen, kept four to a room. The rooms had a sink and a latrine, just like prisons on earth. They got three meals a day, and if they felt sick or accidentally got hurt the guards would take them to the healers ward. The beds weren't much, but Vickers had spent three years hot-cotting on ships before he'd become a SEAL, and knew they could have been worse. Combined with the fact that Earth had sent over books for them, all inspected of course, and they actually had a pretty easy, if boring, time.

Some of the guards might have been a bit harsher than others. But Vickers couldn't blame them for that. The battle in the desert had been rather large. Most of the Petravian soldiers knew at least one or two people who'd been killed or injured there, either by the soldiers themselves, or by the thermobaric rounds from the Miffy's. And angry or not, the guards never broke any of the rules of conduct that the King had agreed to when it came to the treatment of the P.O.W.s.

"Alright." He said as the last of them stepped into their cell, and the guard shut it behind em. "Zero Five tomorrow. Same bat time. Same bat channel. Endurance day." He finished as several of them groaned at the announcement.

The air force prisoners, and the one Navy Petty Officer, weren't fans of his endurance days. The army soldiers only complained if it went further than three miles, though they still kept up. And the two marines that were still locked up only ever complained if they had to wear shirts while running.

Vickers chuckled. Even as prisoners, Jarheads were gonna be Jarheads. He knew that even when they hated the exercise the prisoners were probably glad just to be up and moving.

After leaving the dungeon behind he went back outside and began exercising himself. He'd led the prisoners through PT at normal human levels. Well, actually he'd gone a little harder than normal. They'd all been here long enough that their bodies were at least close to being fully infused with magic like he and Choi. But he still hadn't satisfied his own need for exercise.

He'd learned early on that while his new form wanted to be nocturnal, it still got the equivalent of zoomies if he didn't burn off energy fast enough. His first few days as a were-jaguar had been exhausting enough to keep it at bay. Then there had been his week or so with Atrafar, and the events at the druid forest. But once things had settled down, and he had lost his sexual partner, he'd woken up almost every night feeling restless and full of manic energy. So, mornings had become time for extreme weight lifting (he was up to nearly two tons now), long distance running (ten miles minimum), and combat training.

He was happy to have re-learned the way to get magic to flow through his new form, and could successfully manifest frost on his clawed hands once again. But he'd had to adjust his fighting style. Most of his power was now in his legs, and of all places, in his jaw. Plus his hands, while significantly stronger and equipped with built in daggers, weren't well suited to punching. His new style had become something akin to a strange combination of capoeira and jiu jitsu. But when coupled with the claws and ice it became something that none of the castle guards he sparred with could counter without using a pole-arm to stay out of his range.

Once he'd thoroughly exhausted himself, Vickers bathed and changed into his day clothes, a mish mash of his old uniform and some Petravian robes that had been altered for his new physique, especially his tail and his legs. Then he went to the dining hall and ate a plate of food that was vastly larger than any meal he'd ever eaten as a human, and mostly lightly cooked meat too. He still tried to ensure that there were starches and vegetables. But he'd quickly learned that things too heavy in garlic or onions would give him an upset stomach. Even after the mountainous meal he usually felt at least a little hungry. He was still adjusting to that part.

Then, as much as his new body begged for a long nap, Vickers walked through the halls toward the King's meeting room, which reminded Vickers of his old college lecture halls, where he started most days. Sure enough, he was in there speaking to several of the castle blacksmiths, something about needing more steel and brass, though they hushed up when the King nodded to Vickers. He was used to that, even now.

Vickers took a seat and waited patiently, and the King sent one of his aides over with a small envelope for him. He recognized the seal with the small dual lunar cycle on it, bisected by a simple representation of the planet's rings.

He looked up at the King, who saw him and nodded before resuming the conversation with the two blacksmiths.

Vickers slid a claw under the seal and reopened it. The King had already read it, no surprise there.

Then he began reading the Lunar Council's reply to his and the King's request.

And while he was happy with most of the contents, he was somewhat concerned about the method entailed. More precisely, he was worried about how HE was involved in what was being described.

Well. I signed up for it. He thought to himself as he placed a clawed hand on his temple and rubbed at it in frustration. *Comes with the new car smell.*

When he was done he took a deep breath, folded the letter back up, and waited for his chance to speak to the King.

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In his opinion they had it easy for Prisoners. They were, with the exception of Nguyen, kept four to a room. The rooms had a sink and a latrine, just like prisons on earth. They got three meals a day, and if they felt sick or accidentally got hurt the guards would take them to the healers ward. The beds weren't much, but Vickers had spent three years hot-cotting on ships before he'd become a SEAL, and knew they could have been worse. Combined with the fact that Earth had sent over books for them, all inspected of course, and they actually had a pretty easy, if boring, time.

Some of the guards might have been a bit harsher than others. But Vickers couldn't blame them for that. The battle in the desert had been rather large. Most of the Petravian soldiers knew at least one or two people who'd been killed or injured there, either by the soldiers themselves, or by the thermobaric rounds from the Miffy's. And angry or not, the guards never broke any of the rules of conduct that the King had agreed to when it came to the treatment of the P.O.W.s.

"Alright." He said as the last of them stepped into their cell, and the guard shut it behind em. "Zero Five tomorrow. Same bat time. Same bat channel. Endurance day." He finished as several of them groaned at the announcement.

The air force prisoners, and the one Navy Petty Officer, weren't fans of his endurance days. The army soldiers only complained if it went further than three miles, though they still kept up. And the two marines that were still locked up only ever complained if they had to wear shirts while running.

Vickers chuckled. Even as prisoners, Jarheads were gonna be Jarheads. He knew that even when they hated the exercise the prisoners were probably glad just to be up and moving.

After leaving the dungeon behind he went back outside and began exercising himself. He'd led the prisoners through PT at normal human levels. Well, actually he'd gone a little harder than normal. They'd all been here long enough that their bodies were at least close to being fully infused with magic like he and Choi. But he still hadn't satisfied his own need for exercise.

He'd learned early on that while his new form wanted to be nocturnal, it still got the equivalent of zoomies if he didn't burn off energy fast enough. His first few days as a were-jaguar had been exhausting enough to keep it at bay. Then there had been his week or so with Atrafar, and the events at the druid forest. But once things had settled down, and he had lost his sexual partner, he'd woken up almost every night feeling restless and full of manic energy. So, mornings had become time for extreme weight lifting (he was up to nearly two tons now), long distance running (ten miles minimum), and combat training.

He was happy to have re-learned the way to get magic to flow through his new form, and could successfully manifest frost on his clawed hands once again. But he'd had to adjust his fighting style. Most of his power was now in his legs, and of all places, in his jaw. Plus his hands, while significantly stronger and equipped with built in daggers, weren't well suited to punching. His new style had become something akin to a strange combination of capoeira and jiu jitsu. But when coupled with the claws and ice it became something that none of the castle guards he sparred with could counter without using a pole-arm to stay out of his range.

Once he'd thoroughly exhausted himself, Vickers bathed and changed into his day clothes, a mish mash of his old uniform and some Petravian robes that had been altered for his new physique, especially his tail and his

legs. Then he went to the dining hall and ate a plate of food that was vastly larger than any meal he'd ever eaten as a human, and mostly lightly cooked meat too. He still tried to ensure that there were starches and vegetables. But he'd quickly learned that things too heavy in garlic or onions would give him an upset stomach. Even after the mountainous meal he usually felt at least a little hungry. He was still adjusting to that part.

Then, as much as his new body begged for a long nap, Vickers walked through the halls toward the King's meeting room, which reminded Vickers of his old college lecture halls, where he started most days. Sure enough, he was in there speaking to several of the castle blacksmiths, something about needing more steel and brass, though they hushed up when the King nodded to Vickers. He was used to that, even now.

Vickers took a seat and waited patiently, and the King sent one of his aides over with a small envelope for him. He recognized the seal with the small dual lunar cycle on it, bisected by a simple representation of the planet's rings.

He looked up at the King, who saw him and nodded before resuming the conversation with the two blacksmiths.

Vickers slid a claw under the seal and reopened it. The King had already read it, no surprise there.

Then he began reading the Lunar Council's reply to his and the King's request.

And while he was happy with most of the contents, he was somewhat concerned about the method entailed. More precisely, he was worried about how HE was involved in what was being described.

Well. I signed up for it. He thought to himself as he placed a clawed hand on his temple and rubbed at it in frustration. *Comes with the new car smell.*

When he was done he took a deep breath, folded the letter back up, and waited for his chance to speak to the King.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11o54p9/wait_is_this_just_gate_327/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (325/?)

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James nodded. \[Sorry.\] He said simply. \[I thought you were trying to threaten us.\]

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And just like the ancient gods of myth from Earth, they had earned the wrath of the god of the arts.

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Emperor Vateris tilted his head in confusion for a moment as he considered the warning. Then nodded.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11me665/wait_is_this_just_gate_326/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (325/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11khlzi/wait_is_this_just_gate_324/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (324/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11hhmuu/wait_is_this_just_gate_323/)

Writer's note: Could both of them have handled this better? Probably. But James is used to acting/speaking before he acts. This is par for the course for him. And the Emperor's reasoning will be explained next chapter.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina were on their way out of the Imperial Palace to grab some dinner, and to look into staying somewhere else for the duration of their stay, when the Emperor's guards made their move.

They had been housed IN the palace, in the ambassadorial wing that was remarkably similar to the one in King Farrick's castle, and as such had known after their encounter earlier that they needed to leave. The two of them had donned their armor and weapons and grabbed the two bottomless bags they'd brought with them, and were going to head to the stables for Steve, and had just opened the doors to alert their two Petravian guards.

Then they'd seen the cohort of Vatrian guards standing outside their room door. These were not the flashy, plumed and colorful, guards that had been in the grand hall during the Emperor's announcements. Rather, they were wearing duller, less ornate, armor and carried weapons more fitting to the close quarters of the palace they were in. In short, they were ready for a fight. The three Petravian guards outside their room were standing in their normal positions, but there was a tenseness there that both of them could feel. And James noticed that each of them had their hands on their weapons, and he could feel one of them pulling magical energy into themselves at a low and slow rate, keeping it subtle.

"How's it going guys?" James said as he slowly stepped in front of Amina, and quietly released the retention strap on his revolver, which he kept behind him as well. "There a problem?"

The lead guard of the Vatrian group took a half step forward and looked James in the eyes, making a point of ignoring the Petravian guards as their swords inched out of their scabbards. The man was large, and dark of skin, his mouth bulged with the tell tale signs of Orc teeth, and his

arms were longer than a normal humans, marking him as a half-orc. On his waste was a short handled war hammer that reminded James of the Norse god Thor. Though it had more spikes than that fabled weapon. His voice was deep and rumbled in a way that made it seem like his vocal chords couldn't handle the amount of bass in it.

"His Majesty, Emperor Vateris, REQUESTS you attend his study for a conversation." The large man said. Then he looked at Amina. "A private conversation."

James felt Amina press against him ever so slightly, then she patted him on the side, right above where he was resting his hand on the grip of his Colt.

"I have no issue with speaking with the Emperor, if that is his wish." James said. "But under no circumstances am I going to leave my wife unattended in an unfamiliar land. Not after the excitement of earlier." He held his wolf hand up for emphasis. Then moved it, imitating the hand gestures from earlier. "I'm gonna guess that he and I can have a private conversation even in a crowded room. She comes with, or I don't go. No exceptions." He tried to ignore the cold sweat that formed as the Vatrian guards visibly bristled at the display of the so-called way of the arms.

"It is that very HERESY...." The lead guard said, his jaw clenching as he said the last word. "That is cause for him to summon you."

"I kinda figured." James said steadily. He heard, and partially felt, Amina pulling one of the three speed loaders from the back of his belt. "Like I said. She and I go together, or not at all." He nodded at the guards behind the large man. "And that's not enough people to stop us from leaving if it comes to it."

There was a creaking noise from one side of the room that made James tense as his eyes began to glow gold. A small woman in dark, ninja-like, robes emerged from the bathroom of their room with a drawn bow. There was a clacking as one of their windows opened, and a similarly dressed man kneeled on their window ledge with a crossbow.

"That's better." He said. "But still not enough."

"James." Amina said softly as she adjusted to cover them from the new threats. "That's an arbalestier." She said of the man in the window. "And they are Vatrian way-walkers. We may see two. But there's probably five or six more that we DON'T see."

James looked back just a bit, with a raised eyebrow. He didn't have time to ask what that was at the moment.

"The Emperor only makes requests once." The lead guard said. "Though he ordered us to ASSURE you... that should he find your conversation pleasing, no harm shall come to either of you. Additionally, even if he finds the conversation UN-pleasing. You would simply be held as guests until he and your King could speak face to face."

"And we will gladly speak with him." Amina said. "But with the rights of royal guests we request that it be in accompaniment of each other."

The large man seemed to consider this for a moment. Then he nodded.

"This is acceptable. But please leave your weapons here with your guards." He said sternly. "Nobody is allowed in his presence armed, least of all in his study or chambers." Then he untied the chain-mail under his neck and bared a tattoo on his upper chest. "I swear honesty and safety to you both until such time as my Emperor explicitly orders otherwise. On my duty." He said. As he did the tattoo flared with a dark red light and he grimaced for a moment.

And just like that the Petravian guards seemed to relax. Amina even pressed the speed loader back into its pouch on his belt and closed the magnetic flap over it.

He looked back at her curiously again.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (324/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11hhcoa/wait_is_this_just_gate_323/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Could both of them have handled this better? Probably. But James is used to acting/speaking before he acts. This is par for the course for him. And the Emperor's reasoning will be explained next chapter.

Enjoy.

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James and Amina were on their way out of the Imperial Palace to grab some dinner, and to look into staying somewhere else for the duration of their stay, when the Emperor's guards made their move.

They had been housed IN the palace, in the ambassadorial wing that was remarkably similar to the one in King Farrick's castle, and as such had known after their encounter earlier that they needed to leave. The two of them had donned their armor and weapons and grabbed the two bottomless bags they'd brought with them, and were going to head to the stables for Steve, and had just opened the doors to alert their two Petravian guards.

Then they'd seen the cohort of Vatrian guards standing outside their room door. These were not the flashy, plumed and colorful, guards that had been in the grand hall during the Emperor's announcements. Rather, they were wearing duller, less ornate, armor and carried weapons more fitting to the close quarters of the palace they were in. In short, they were ready for a fight. The three Petravian guards outside their room were standing in their normal positions, but there was a tenseness there that both of them could feel. And James noticed that each of them had their hands on their weapons, and he could feel one of them pulling magical energy into themselves at a low and slow rate, keeping it subtle.

"How's it going guys?" James said as he slowly stepped in front of Amina, and quietly released the retention strap on his revolver, which he kept behind him as well. "There a problem?"

The lead guard of the Vatrian group took a half step forward and looked James in the eyes, making a point of ignoring the Petravian guards as their swords inched out of their scabbards. The man was large, and dark of skin, his mouth bulged with the tell tale signs of Orc teeth, and his arms were longer than a normal humans, marking him as a half-orc. On his waste was a short handled war hammer that reminded James of the Norse god Thor. Though it had more spikes than that fabled weapon. His voice was deep and rumbled in a way that made it seem like his vocal chords couldn't handle the amount of bass in it.

"His Majesty, Emperor Vateris, REQUESTS you attend his study for a conversation." The large man said. Then he looked at Amina. "A private conversation."

James felt Amina press against him ever so slightly, then she patted him on the side, right above where he was resting his hand on the grip of his Colt.

"I have no issue with speaking with the Emperor, if that is his wish." James said. "But under no circumstances am I going to leave my wife unattended in an unfamiliar land. Not after the excitement of earlier." He held his wolf hand up for emphasis. Then moved it, imitating the hand gestures from earlier. "I'm gonna guess that he and I can have a private conversation even in a crowded room. She comes with, or I don't go. No exceptions." He tried to ignore the cold sweat that formed as the Vatrian guards visibly bristled at the display of the so-called way of the arms.

"It is that very HERESY...." The lead guard said, his jaw clenching as he said the last word. "That is cause for him to summon you."

"I kinda figured." James said steadily. He heard, and partially felt, Amina pulling one of the three speed loaders from the back of his belt.

"Like I said. She and I go together, or not at all." He nodded at the guards behind the large man. "And that's not enough people to stop us from leaving if it comes to it."

There was a creaking noise from one side of the room that made James tense as his eyes began to glow gold. A small woman in dark, ninja-like, robes emerged from the bathroom of their room with a drawn bow. There was a clacking as one of their windows opened, and a similarly dressed man kneeled on their window ledge with a crossbow.

"That's better." He said. "But still not enough."

"James." Amina said softly as she adjusted to cover them from the new threats. "That's an arbalestier." She said of the man in the window. "And they are Vatrian way-walkers. We may see two. But there's probably five or six more that we DON'T see."

James looked back just a bit, with a raised eyebrow. He didn't have time to ask what that was at the moment.

"The Emperor only makes requests once." The lead guard said. "Though he ordered us to ASSURE you... that should he find your conversation pleasing, no harm shall come to either of you. Additionally, even if he finds the conversation UN-pleasing. You would simply be held as guests until he and your King could speak face to face."

"And we will gladly speak with him." Amina said. "But with the rights of royal guests we request that it be in accompaniment of each other."

The large man seemed to consider this for a moment. Then he nodded.

"This is acceptable. But please leave your weapons here with your guards." He said sternly. "Nobody is allowed in his presence armed, least of all in his study or chambers." Then he untied the chain-mail under his neck and bared a tattoo on his upper chest. "I swear honesty and safety to you both until such time as my Emperor explicitly orders otherwise. On my duty." He said. As he did the tattoo flared with a dark red light and he grimaced for a moment.

And just like that the Petravian guards seemed to relax. Amina even pressed the speed loader back into its pouch on his belt and closed the magnetic flap over it.

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"If a Vatrian royal guard swears on their duty then it costs their life to break that vow." She said simply. "At the very least we can trust HIM." She added with a nod toward the large man. "Isn't that right Commander Tyrius."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (323/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11gmqkp/wait_is_this_just_gate_322/)

Writer's note: Of course things get more complicated. It's James we're talking about.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina were in the middle of talking to a Vatrian merchant about shops they needed to visit in the city when the Royal Guards stationed around the royal hall yelled out, heralding the arrival of the Vatrian Emperor.

The palace's construction was reminiscent of those he had seen in footage about ancient Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern kingdoms from ancient Earth. With tall domed towers and wide open areas illuminated only by large windows and doorways that let in the scent of the city below. Despite that the designs on the walls weren't of the geometric, and borderline mathematically sequenced design one would expect of such architecture, but rather of the square, and angular design he might expect of ancient Aztec or Mayan temples. The combination made him feel like he was on the set of an old Indiana Jones movie.

It also kind of made his head hurt to wonder how they had combined the two clashing styles and somehow succeeded.

The wide open hall they were in echoed loudly as the guards yelled out.

Unlike Amina, James understood the announcement. He'd decided that, since he was in a different country with a different language, he should wear his green medallion. He hadn't worn the thing, even casually, in close to a year now.

James felt the hairs on his wolf arm bristle at the content of the announcement.

"HIS HOLY EMINENCE, THE GOD TO BE, EMPEROR VIYA VATERIS!" The guards announced in near perfect unison. The yellow feathered plumes of their helmets bobbing up and down as they made quick bows before raising their spears. To James the guards looked like a cross between Persian

immortals and winged hussars. Though the wings in question were on their helmets and vambraces instead of their backs.

The entire crowd moved as one to face forward, and James noticed that the Vatrians all bowed their heads.

He squeezed Amina's hand. "Are we supposed to bow too?" He asked.

"Is it the emperor?" She asked. She had never learned Vatrian like her sister. He nodded in response. "Then only when he addresses us directly, and only once. We're royalty. The rules are a bit different for us. Just do as I do." She said. James nodded again.

Then a child entered the room. Or at least they looked like a child to James. But he noticed that they had both the slightly pointed ears that marked them as having elf blood, so he didn't actually KNOW how old they might be. They wore a flowing blue robe that glittered with gemstones around the neck and the ends of the sleeves, and a pair of servants carried the tail of their robes up off of the ground. A combination crown/wreath made of silver and a vine of flowers that seemed to change color based on the angle they sat at, sat atop their head.

James was just about to mention how... over the top... he looked.

Then they began to "speak" and something happened to James that had never happened in his time in this world.

Instead of speaking with their mouth and vocal chords, the Vatrian emperor began speaking in hand gestures that reminded James of A.S.L., though they were significantly more complex. A royal attendant in robes that echoed the emperors spoke the translated meaning to the crowd haltingly as she watched her emperor gesticulate.

That alone wouldn't have been strange to James. What was strange was that he UNDERSTOOD what the emperor was saying without the need of the translator.

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Then he rushed forward, causing the two attendants to scramble to keep up. The crowd parted before him in a rush of bowed heads.

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arm that he had been "gifted" by the moon goddess. He backed up a step, continuing to eye James up and down as he did.

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"Yes." He answered.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (323/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11gmop0/wait_is_this_just_gate_322/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Of course things get more complicated. It's James we're talking about.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina were in the middle of talking to a Vatrian merchant about shops they needed to visit in the city when the Royal Guards stationed around the royal hall yelled out, heralding the arrival of the Vatrian Emperor.

The palace's construction was reminiscent of those he had seen in footage about ancient Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern kingdoms from ancient Earth. With tall domed towers and wide open areas illuminated only by large windows and doorways that let in the scent of the city below. Despite that the designs on the walls weren't of the geometric, and borderline mathematically sequenced design one would expect of such architecture, but rather of the square, and angular design he might expect of ancient Aztec or Mayan temples. The combination made him feel like he was on the set of an old Indiana Jones movie.

It also kind of made his head hurt to wonder how they had combined the two clashing styles and somehow succeeded.

The wide open hall they were in echoed loudly as the guards yelled out.

Unlike Amina, James understood the announcement. He'd decided that, since he was in a different country with a different language, he should wear his green medallion. He hadn't worn the thing, even casually, in close to a year now.

James felt the hairs on his wolf arm bristle at the content of the announcement.

"HIS HOLY EMINENCE, THE GOD TO BE, EMPEROR VIYA VATERIS!" The guards announced in near perfect unison. The yellow feathered plumes of their helmets bobbing up and down as they made quick bows before raising their spears. To James the guards looked like a cross between Persian immortals and winged hussars. Though the wings in question were on their helmets and vambraces instead of their backs.

The entire crowd moved as one to face forward, and James noticed that the Vatrians all bowed their heads.

He squeezed Amina's hand. "Are we supposed to bow too?" He asked.

"Is it the emperor?" She asked. She had never learned Vatrian like her sister. He nodded in response. "Then only when he addresses us directly, and only once. We're royalty. The rules are a bit different for us. Just do as I do." She said. James nodded again.

Then a child entered the room. Or at least they looked like a child to James. But he noticed that they had the slightly pointed ears that marked them as having elf blood, so he didn't actually KNOW how old they might be. They wore a flowing blue robe that glittered with gemstones around the neck and the ends of the sleeves, and a pair of servants carried the tail of their robes up off of the ground. A combination crown/wreath made of silver and a vine of flowers that seemed to change color based on the angle they sat at, sat atop their head.

James was just about to mention how... over the top... he looked.

Then they began to "speak" and something happened to James that had never happened in his time in this world.

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circumstances that had made such a thing possible despite their previous beliefs to the contrary.

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He jumped whenever things moved too fast, or made unexpected, or loud noises. Though he always did so between her and whatever had done so.

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Frequently she would ask him what was wrong only to see him turn, and she'd notice a golden glow fading from his eyes as he did.

"James?" She asked hesitantly as she approached him on the balcony of their suite in the Vatrian Emperor's castle.

"Yes." He replied quickly as he turned to her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She said with her hands up in a placating gesture as she joined him at the balcony. "Not with me anyways."

He tilted his head a bit as he donned a confused expression and took her hand in his. "What do you mean?" He asked.

"James." She began. "What's been going on with you lately?"

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"James. I am a General." She said sternly. "But before that I was a soldier. Same as anyone else. Including you."

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"That was a test wasn't it?" He asked as he leaned back against the railings and hung his head a bit.

She nodded.

He released her hand, though he did so hesitantly, and looked down at the city below. Then he looked up at the pre-dusk sky, at the handful of stars that were beginning to glint here and there.

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"James. Joseph was your little brother. And that made him MY little brother too." She said as a single tear fell down her cheek. "And Kela was more like a sister to me than even Ferria or Xarina."

"I know." He said softly.

"This is a dangerous world. And we have lost much these past two years." She continued. "And I would be lying if I said that my life before your arrival was as much of a tempest as it has been since."

He looked at her curiously.

"But I will not be coddled James." She said finally. "Not when I haven't even had a chance to get an affirmation from a life priestess."

James cringed at that. He knew that the life adherents were this worlds version of fertility shamans. But he still didn't like the idea of relying on someone who worshiped the deity that had taken part in his brother's death. And he also couldn't exactly request an ultrasound machine from Earth without raising questions all over the place.

"The time will come my love." She said softly. "When I will be fat, and hobbling, and complaining of sore feet, strange hungers, and an angry bladder." She smiled as he looked up at her. "Dote on me then. Until then we are in a city I have never seen before, on our honeymoon. Can we try to enjoy it?"

James smiled. "Sorry." He said. "I just... I worry."

"You would not be a good husband if you didn't." Then she headbutted him ever so lightly. "But you have to see the irony of those words when you say them." Then she stole a page from his book and made her tone as haughty as possible. " Great and powerful storm slayer."

He chuckled at the turn around. "Fair enough." He said simply. Then the smile on his face faltered a little bit. "When do you go to get um.... affirmed?"

She thought for a moment. "Well. Our meeting with the emperor is tomorrow afternoon. We'll be expected to hold court with them until then. So... day after?"

"Do I go with you for that?" He asked uncertainly.

"Well you are the father right?" She asked rhetorically with a grin.

"Hard to tell." James said with a fake graveness. "I've seen the way some of the castle guards look at you when you walk past."

"James!" She exclaimed in mock hurt as she lightly punched his shoulder. Then she looked away. "I didn't think you'd noticed that."

And just like that the conversation stopped being serious.

They talked about plans for the week they intended to spend here before moving on to the next destination. The things Amina wanted to shop for, the foods James wanted to try, the popular sights to visit. Apparently there were weekly dueling tournaments, and both of them wanted to see if they could win the champions purse, though neither of them needed it.

And they discussed baby names. Though they did so with mild caution, in case it was too soon.

Over the next few days, Amina was happy to notice James relax, even if only a little bit.

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Vickers walked slowly and confidently as he moved through the castle hallways. He chewed on a bun full of bacon as he did.

In his other hand was a folder full of new orders, as well as a letter of pardon from the King.

He presented the latter to the guard Sergeant currently on duty at the door to the castle dungeon.

"What's this then Chief?" Sergeant Kitra asked. She was a tall but remarkably muscular elf. Not quite as big as the one that everyone called guardian, but close. They'd become familiar with each other since

Vickers had taken over Choi's duties with the P.O.W.s. Though not friends.

"Conditional release of some of the lower enlisted and newest arrivals." He said as she read over the pardon. "They're to become ambassadorial staff for Werner whenever she gets done with her treatment. I've gotta get them set up."

"Makes sense." She said as she closed the letter back up. "Says no weapons. Guessing busy work?"

"Pretty much." He agreed. Like Choi he'd found it reassuring that even in another world soldiers learned to look busy, and stand by to stand by.

She looked over at the other guard. "Slate got a list?" She asked them. They ran over to the small office that they used as a combination supply and communication room. A minute later he popped back out and nodded. Then she turned back to Vickers. "Follow me Chief." She said and began walking toward the door. Then she turned back to her comrade. "Let em out in order." She said.

"Mind if I have a word with one who aint on the list?" He asked.

Kitra considered it. Then shrugged. "Sure."

A few minutes later Vickers was handing the last of the orders to the last of the soldiers on the list. A young, slightly effeminate, airmen who had apparently been one of the Miffy controllers. He did what he could not to intimidate the young man too much, though apparently his appearance was enough to make that a hard job.

"That's the last of those ones." He said to Kitra after sending the airmen to wait outside in formation with the others. "I'mma talk to Nguyen for a minute."

The Sergeant nodded. "Just make it quick. I'll be right here."

He nodded, then made his way to the last cell in the row. The one with the least amenities and smallest window outside.

Nguyen sat on the ground looking at the wall with a blank stare. He had a scar under his left eye from where Choi had pummeled him.

"PT time chief?" He asked.

"No." Vickers replied. He knew that Nguyen had heard him reading off orders only moments before. "Just a heads up that we're working on a strike back against the Agency. It's not a get out of jail free card or anything. But... Might be a shot at gettin' your dick out of the dirt."

Nguyen looked at him flatly for a moment, then went back to staring at the wall.

"Who says I deserve that?" He asked.

Vickers just shrugged. "Nobody. Can't MAKE you see yourself any kind o' way." He said nonchalantly. "Just figured I'd offer if it became an option."

Nguyen just kept staring at the wall.

Vickers waited a moment, then seeing the lost cause for what it was, turned and walked away.

"Offer's there if you find your balls Nguyen." He said over his shoulder.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11hhmuu/wait_is_this_just_gate_323/)

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"This is a dangerous world. And we have lost much these past two years." She continued. "And I would be lying if I said that my life before your arrival was as much of a tempest as it has been since."

He looked at her curiously.

"But I will not be coddled James." She said finally. "Not when I haven't even had a chance to get an affirmation from a life priestess."

James cringed at that. He knew that the life adherents were this worlds version of fertility shamans. But he still didn't like the idea of relying on someone who worshiped the deity that had taken part in his brother's death. And he also couldn't exactly request an ultrasound machine from Earth without raising questions all over the place.

"The time will come my love." She said softly. "When I will be fat, and hobbling, and complaining of sore feet, strange hungers, and an angry bladder." She smiled as he looked up at her. "Dote on me then. Until then we are in a city I have never seen before, on our honeymoon. Can we try to enjoy it?"

James smiled. "Sorry." He said. "I just... I worry."

"You would not be a good husband if you didn't." Then she headbutted him ever so lightly. "But you have to see the irony of those words when you say them." Then she stole a page from his book and made her tone as haughty as possible. " Great and powerful storm slayer."

He chuckled at the turn around. "Fair enough." He said simply. Then the smile on his face faltered a little bit. "When do you go to get um.... affirmed?"

She thought for a moment. "Well. Our meeting with the emperor is tomorrow afternoon. We'll be expected to hold court with them until then. So... day after?"

"Do I go with you for that?" He asked uncertainly.

"Well you are the father right?" She asked rhetorically with a grin.

"Hard to tell." James said with a fake graveness. "I've seen the way some of the castle guards look at you when you walk past."

"James!" She exclaimed in mock hurt as she lightly punched his shoulder. Then she looked away. "I didn't think you'd noticed that."

And just like that the conversation stopped being serious.

They talked about plans for the week they intended to spend here before moving on to the next destination. The things Amina wanted to shop for, the foods James wanted to try, the popular sights to visit. Apparently there were weekly dueling tournaments, and both of them wanted to see if they could win the champions purse, though neither of them needed it.

And they discussed baby names. Though they did so with mild caution, in case it was too soon.

Over the next few days, Amina was happy to notice James relax, even if only a little bit.

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Vickers walked slowly and confidently as he moved through the castle hallways. He chewed on a bun full of bacon as he did.

In his other hand was a folder full of new orders, as well as a letter of pardon from the King.

He presented the latter to the guard Sergeant currently on duty at the door to the castle dungeon.

"What's this then Chief?" Sergeant Kitra asked. She was a tall but remarkably muscular elf. Not quite as big as the one that everyone called guardian, but close. They'd become familiar with each other since Vickers had taken over Choi's duties with the P.O.W.s. Though not friends.

"Conditional release of some of the lower enlisted and newest arrivals." He said as she read over the pardon. "They're to become ambassadorial staff for Werner whenever she gets done with her treatment. I've gotta get them set up."

"Makes sense." She said as she closed the letter back up. "Says no weapons. Guessing busy work?"

"Pretty much." He agreed. Like Choi he'd found it reassuring that even in another world soldiers learned to look busy, and stand by to stand by.

She looked over at the other guard. "Slate got a list?" She asked them. They ran over to the small office that they used as a combination supply and communication room. A minute later he popped back out and nodded.

Then she turned back to Vickers. "Follow me Chief." She said and began walking toward the door. Then she turned back to her comrade. "Let em out in order." She said.

"Mind if I have a word with one who aint on the list?" He asked.

Kitra considered it. Then shrugged. "Sure."

A few minutes later Vickers was handing the last of the orders to the last of the soldiers on the list. A young, slightly effeminate, airmen who had apparently been one of the Miffy controllers. He did what he could not to intimidate the young man too much, though apparently his appearance was enough to make that a hard job.

"That's the last of those ones." He said to Kitra after sending the airmen to wait outside in formation with the others. "I'mma talk to Nguyen for a minute."

The Sergeant nodded. "Just make it quick. I'll be right here."

He nodded, then made his way to the last cell in the row. The one with the least amenities and smallest window outside.

Nguyen sat on the ground looking at the wall with a blank stare. He had a scar under his left eye from where Choi had pummeled him.

"PT time chief?" He asked.

"No." Vickers replied. He knew that Nguyen had heard him reading off orders only moments before. "Just a heads up that we're working on a strike back against the Agency. It's not a get out of jail free card or anything. But... Might be a shot at gettin' your dick out of the dirt."

Nguyen looked at him flatly for a moment, then went back to staring at the wall.

"Who says I deserve that?" He asked.

Vickers just shrugged. "Nobody. Can't MAKE you see yourself any kind o' way." He said nonchalantly. "Just figured I'd offer if it became an option."

Nguyen just kept staring at the wall.

Vickers waited a moment, then seeing the lost cause for what it was, turned and walked away.

"Offer's there if you find your balls Nguyen." He said over his shoulder.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11hhcoa/wait_is_this_just_gate_323/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (321/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11emsi1/wait_is_this_just_gate_320/)

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Enjoy.

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He resisted the urge to call out for his brother as he sat bolt upright in the hammock, rocking it precariously for just a moment. He breathed heavily as he realized that he was once again coated in cold sweat. He'd woken up like that a lot lately.

He quietly left the slowly rocking hammock and padded over through the back door and out onto the deck that he'd NOT wanted to walk on earlier. A moment later he was pissing off the edge of the mountain. An effort that was worth the risk as far as he and any other man would be concerned.

He heard a noise that, at first, he thought must have been one of the Bug Jumpers from earlier. But after a moment he also heard a muttered curse in a familiar voice.

"Hello?" He asked as he shook and then walked around the side of the hut. "Amina?"

"Huuuuuurk!" He heard come from nearby, and as he rounded the corner he saw her doubled over near a small bit of brush some ten yards away from Steve's slumbering form.

James rushed over to her side and she jumped a bit at his touch. He hadn't even realized that she hadn't been in the hammock when he'd woken up.

"Amina!" He exclaimed as he rubbed her back. "Are you okay?" But he already had an idea of what was happening.

"I'm.... I'm fine." She reassured him as she struggled not to throw up again. "Jus.... just still... hurrr... still nauseous from.... from the fl-AAAAGH!" She answered before retching into the bush again.

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"You sure those rations in your.... in your saddlebags are still good?" She asked after a moment.

James smiled softly, though she couldn't see it as he felt her begin to lurch a bit more.

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When she sat back up on her haunches he pulled her back and into his arms.

"Why didn't you tell me?" He asked.

She took a few more long deep breaths as she wiped her mouth.

"Because of everything that was going on." She replied as she leaned back into him, still breathing irregularly as her other hand rubbed at her still sore stomach. "With the wedding. The.... the thing with the cleanser and the gods.... and Joey. I thought maybe it was just late because of all the stress. I was going to get checked when we got to Vatria. Besides, it wasn't even supposed to be possible. And I didn't want to put more on your shoulders if I ended up being wrong."

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"I'll go get you some water." He said as she slapped at his arm with her hand and gave him a weak thumbs up.

Thirty minutes later they were sitting in the, slightly too small but not quite, hot tub in the hut leaning against each other as the sun came up.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (321/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11emqt0/wait_is_this_just_gate_320/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (320/?)

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Writer's note: Bit of a short one. Steve's the motherfuckin' best. That is all.

Enjoy.

\~

"So there's nothing WE need to do while here?" James asked as he and Amina rode out of the ships hold and onto the small island they'd landed at. "No one to meet and greet. No fancy ceremonies?"

"No." She said as she wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head on his shoulder. "The islands of the Vengien Sea don't have leaders exactly. Mostly just community living."

James rubbed the side of his head against hers. "And they'll have what your sisters need to fix the ship?"

"Eh. Enough of it anyways." Amina replied. "Ferria's men brought enough repair supplies of their own really."

"Sooo... we've got two days on a remote island in the middle of the ocean, with a small mountain known for its view of the lagoon below?" He asked rhetorically. Then he leaned back and looked at her grinning face. "Definitely a coincidence."

She shrugged. "I don't know what you're talking about." She said. "And it's not my fault you scared the crew half to death with your theatrics and that they want you off the ship for a bit."

"Right." He said. Then he kicked Steve into motion. "Steve lets go check out this mountain."

Steve grunted and moved toward the small village that rested nearby and butted up against the small mountain.

It felt good to ride the massive drake again. As James's legs began complaining about the saddle and stirrups he realized that it had been too long since he'd taken Steve out of his pen and gone on a long ride. He missed the black bristle back.

"How are you?" She asked as they made their way into the small village.

One of the villagers, a small child, rushed forward excitedly toward Steve, who rumbled a bit at the burst of motion. But the child's mother grabbed them by the shoulders and lifted them up. James bopped Steve's neck with the palm of his hand in warning. Then he pulled the drake to a stop and waved the mother and child over.

"You can pet him." He said. Steve turned back with a look that James recognized as uncertainty as the mother, equally uncertain, held her child forward. James watched with a small smile as the little boy, who couldn't have been more than five, grabbed large tufts of Steve's fur. "Gently." He cautioned, and watched as the child began to pet the drake more softly. He joined the child and scratched Steve deeply, just like he liked.

Steve leaned into the child a bit.

James turned back to Amina a little bit. "I'm um... I'm okay. I guess."

The mother smiled as her son broke out in hysterical laughter from Steve's massive tongue running up and down his face and leaving a trail of smelly lizard saliva in its wake. She nodded at them as she pulled back, and James kicked Steve back into motion.

The village looked like the pre-war tropical resorts that people would go to in the Caribbean, or Polynesia. The kind where super models would be photographed on inflatable beds, or walking among nurse sharks. The houses were elevated huts made out of some kind of bamboo and palm fronds.

"What was that with the lightning then?" She asked as she held her hands up and brushed them against some of the roofing of one of the houses. "Rina said it looked like you had had a death wish."

James thought back to the fight with the storm. Admittedly, he hadn't known whether or not his plan with the lightning would work.

"We needed to get the ship out of the storm." He replied. "And I needed to hit something that could take it."

Amina didn't reply. She could understand that.

"How's your stomach?" He asked instead.

She pulled back a bit and rubbed at the still sore abdominal muscles there. "Better." She said. "Still sore. But better."

"I thought you didn't have a problem with ships?" He wondered as Steve began to incline up the mountain.

"I normally don't." She agreed. "But then again that isn't exactly a normal ship. And I can't recall the last time I was on a ship during a storm. I don't think I ever have been."

James nodded. "Yeah... A couple more minutes and we probably would have been fighting for space in the bathroom."

They rode that way in silence for a few minutes, enjoying the shade of the trees as they passed over them. James marveled at the sight of some kind of winged marsupial that occasionally glided from one tree to the other, eating flying insects that it caught as it did. Steve watched them with hungry curiosity. One of them landed on a tree just above where they were riding and James stared into its large blue eyes as it watched them pass below it.

"What are those called?" He asked.

"I don't know." She admitted. "Last time I was here was when Ferria got married. I was too busy being Father's guard to pay much attention. Especially since Kela didn't come along on that trip."

James looked back at her curiously.

"She had just had the pups." She said in answer to his unspoken question.

James did some mental math. "How old was your sister when she got married? He asked.

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"And all I have to do is sleep?" Werner asked.

"That's all." The woman said. "Three days and three nights of slumber."

"We'll handle the rest." Shrend said.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (320/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11dmsdw/wait_is_this_just_gate_319/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Bit of a short one. Steve's the motherfuckin' best. That is all.

Enjoy.

\~

"So there's nothing WE need to do while here?" James asked as he and Amina rode out of the ships hold and onto the small island they'd landed at. "No one to meet and greet. No fancy ceremonies?"

"No." She said as she wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head on his shoulder. "The islands of the Vengien Sea don't have leaders exactly. Mostly just community living."

James rubbed the side of his head against hers. "And they'll have what your sisters need to fix the ship?"

"Eh. Enough of it anyways." Amina replied. "Ferria's men brought enough repair supplies of their own really."

"Sooo... we've got two days on a remote island in the middle of the ocean, with a small mountain known for its view of the lagoon below?" He asked rhetorically. Then he leaned back and looked at her grinning face. "Definitely a coincidence."

She shrugged. "I don't know what you're talking about." She said. "And it's not my fault you scared the crew half to death with your theatrics and that they want you off the ship for a bit."

"Right." He said. Then he kicked Steve into motion. "Steve lets go check out this mountain."

Steve grunted and moved toward the small village that rested nearby and butted up against the small mountain.

It felt good to ride the massive drake again. As James's legs began complaining about the saddle and stirrups he realized that it had been too long since he'd taken Steve out of his pen and gone on a long ride. He missed the black bristle back.

"How are you?" She asked as they made their way into the small village.

One of the villagers, a small child, rushed forward excitedly toward Steve, who rumbled a bit at the burst of motion. But the child's mother grabbed them by the shoulders and lifted them up. James bopped Steve's neck with the palm of his hand in warning. Then he pulled the drake to a stop and waved the mother and child over.

"You can pet him." He said. Steve turned back with a look that James recognized as uncertainty as the mother, equally uncertain, held her child forward. James watched with a small smile as the little boy, who couldn't have been more than five, grabbed large tufts of Steve's fur. "Gently." He cautioned, and watched as the child began to pet the drake more softly. He joined the child and scratched Steve deeply, just like he liked.

Steve leaned into the child a bit.

James turned back to Amina a little bit. "I'm um... I'm okay. I guess."

The mother smiled as her son broke out in hysterical laughter from Steve's massive tongue running up and down his face and leaving a trail of smelly lizard saliva in its wake. She nodded at them as she pulled back, and James kicked Steve back into motion.

The village looked like the pre-war tropical resorts that people would go to in the Caribbean, or Polynesia. The kind where super models would be photographed on inflatable beds, or walking among nurse sharks. The houses were elevated huts made out of some kind of bamboo and palm fronds.

"What was that with the lightning then?" She asked as she held her hands up and brushed them against some of the roofing of one of the houses. "Rina said it looked like you had had a death wish."

James thought back to the fight with the storm. Admittedly, he hadn't known whether or not his plan with the lightning would work.

"We needed to get the ship out of the storm." He replied. "And I needed to hit something that could take it."

Amina didn't reply. She could understand that.

"How's your stomach?" He asked instead.

She pulled back a bit and rubbed at the still sore abdominal muscles there. "Better." She said. "Still sore. But better."

"I thought you didn't have a problem with ships?" He wondered as Steve began to incline up the mountain.

"I normally don't." She agreed. "But then again that isn't exactly a normal ship. And I can't recall the last time I was on a ship during a storm. I don't think I ever have been."

James nodded. "Yeah... A couple more minutes and we probably would have been fighting for space in the bathroom."

They rode that way in silence for a few minutes, enjoying the shade of the trees as they passed over them. James marveled at the sight of some kind of winged marsupial that occasionally glided from one tree to the other, eating flying insects that it caught as it did. Steve watched them with hungry curiosity. One of them landed on a tree just above where they were riding and James stared into its large blue eyes as it watched them pass below it.

"What are those called?" He asked.

"I don't know." She admitted. "Last time I was here was when Ferria got married. I was too busy being Father's guard to pay much attention. Especially since Kela didn't come along on that trip."

James looked back at her curiously.

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Enjoy

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"Oh gods... make it-" Amina began as she clung to the edge of the latrine in their room. Then she stuck her head into the hole and spewed vomit for several seconds. "Make it stop." She said in a whimper before the ship rolled to the side, forcing her to brace herself on the wall.

There was a deafening boom as lightning flashed past the side of the ship outside and James struggled not to join her. Especially now that he could hear her throwing up again.

The air ship had been flying through the outer edge of the storm front for nearly four hours now. And James couldn't imagine how much worse it would have been if they'd been on an actual OCEAN ship down below.

He dipped a washcloth in the basin of water near his wife, doing what he could not to let the basin overflow as the ship rolled again, then rang it out and pressed it to the back of her neck as he pulled a zip-tie from one of his pockets and pulled her hair back before tying it into a pony tail. It wasn't perfect, and the zip-tie was less than ideal. But it would work.

"How...how long?" She began, then turned green as she held her stomach in. "How much longer?"

"I'll go ask." He said as he lurched out of the bathroom at an angle.

He staggered in a wide stance as he made his way down the corridor toward the stairs up. He passed Steve's pen, the poor drake spread as wide and as flat as he could be with his claws dug into the wood of the ships floor and wall, and paused long enough to tell the massive lizard to hold on a bit longer.

Then he managed to get up to the door to the top deck.

And saw nothing but grey mist.

"AFT SIDE!" Yelled the smoky voice of Amina's second youngest sister Xarina. "AFT SIDE YA DOLT!"

"Aye!" A voice shouted back.

There was a crack, and a flash of slightly blueish light as James felt magical energy discharge somewhere behind and above him.

KRAKOOM!

James instinctively ducked down inside the doorway as the sky went blindingly bright with light. His ears rang with the report of the lightning that had just blasted past them. Then Xarina staggered past him, almost forty five degrees askew, as she confidently crossed the deck of the ship. She wore a large leather patch over her right eye that held a large blue crystal in front of it. The crystal glowed a bit as she turned her head.

"FORWARD PORT!" She yelled out. "PROJECT IT!"

"Aye miss!" A different voice called. James felt the familiar magical buildup before there was another small lightning blast that he actually saw through the mist. It cast an eerie shadow around its caster as it flew out a few yards and then detonated.

KABOOM!

He practically threw himself back down the stairs and into the ship's hold as a massive bolt of NATURAL lightning immediately replaced the one the caster had sent out. It flew past the side of the ship, missing it by mere inches, or so it seemed to James.

"SKYWARD!" Xarina yelled frantically. "SKYWARD SKYWARD SKYWARD!"

Again the buildup of magical energy. But this time from all over the ship, and James saw the faint shimmer of a shield form over the-

KABOOM!

The shield flared as a hammer of lightning slammed into it from above and spidered out across its shimmering blue form. Someone cried out.

"HOLD YA BUNCH O' VATRIAN DIRT EATERS!" Xarina yelled. Then the lightning was gone again.

James staggered back up and out and toward the princess's voice. After a few moments of staggering drunkenly about he found her and latched onto her shoulder. She rounded on him with a manic expression on her face.

"What are you doin' here HERO!?" She asked. "Ye should be below with the rest."

"What the fuck is going on?" He asked.

Her eyepiece glared with blue light and she stepped over and past him.

"AFT SIDE AGAIN!" She yelled. "PORTWARD!"

"Aye!" One of the ship-hands yelled again. And this time James was braced for the lightning that flew past.

"Can't you see we're a touch busy?" She asked as he recovered. "Bloody Vatrians didn't even put in any dampening for their enchantments!" She said, more to herself than for his benefit. "We're attracting every stray lightning bolt the storm has to give. And it's got a lot."

"What?" James asked.

She glared at him as if he was an idiot. Then shouldered past him.

"STARBOARD SIDE!" She yelled.

Another "Aye!" Another spell, and another blast of lightning.

Then she looked back at him. "The Vatrians." She said, each word dripping with disgust. "Built a bloody flying ship. That's full o' magic. They didn't think of what would happen if a bloody magic ship got caught in a bleedin' storm!" She gestured at the grey mist of the cloud they were in. "Like oh... I don't know. THIS BLOODY STORM!"

Before James could react she waved her hand and a bolt of red lightning flew out past the front of the ship at an angle, then detonated into a spider web of similarly colored lightning that went every way except toward the ship.

KABOOM!

"Didn't even put any damned redirection tubing in place." She grumbled as she scanned around with the crystal eye piece.

"What do we do?" He asked as the ship rolled. He fell to a knee as his wolf hand dug into the ship's deck. Xarina simply listed in the other direction, her feet barely moving.

"Fuck can we do?" She asked rhetorically. Then she cupped her hands around her mouth. "STARBOARD!" Another lightning blast. "All we can do is keep redirecting them manually and hope the men hold out until we can get clear." She said grimly.

"Get clear?" He said curiously as he thought hard.

She cocked an eyebrow. "Yeah." She said in confusion. "Of the storm. Obviously."

"No." He said. "I mean..... What if we cleared the storm?"

"Yeah." She said with her arms wide. "THAT'S THE IDEA!" Then she turned as the gem lit up again. "PORT SIDE!"

Another report. More lightning.

"NO!" He yelled back. "I mean what if WE... Clear the storm ourselves?!?!"

"What?" She asked. "Like... make it go away? That's druidcraft." She scoffed. "Know any druids that strong?"

His face hardened for a moment as he thought of sarcastically replying. "Yeah. Yeah I do." And she seemed to read the thoughts there.

"You know what I mean." She said a bit more softly.

"Right." He said. "Still. How do you normally clear fog?"

"Light and heat." She said. "Helps to have a lot of both."

James gestured at the grey mist around them.

"A cloud is just fog that's up in the sky with a bunch of lightning in it." He said.

"Aye but this is a storm. It's massive." She shot back.

"Then we'd better dress to match." He said simply. And before she could react he began making his way over to the railing at the side of the ship.

"What?" She asked. "You'd have to blast out enough fire to-"

Then James jumped over the railing.

Xarina rushed over to the side, on the verge of yelling out "Man overboard!" as if it would matter a thousand feet above the ocean. Then there was a rapid popping noise, like firecrackers going off. Then James was hovering a few dozen yards out past the rapidly buzzing wings of the ship, which he'd fallen between when he'd jumped off. She could barely see him out in the thick mist, only able to track his location by the twin jets of magical energy emitting from his feet, and the gold glow around his eyes.

She felt magical energy build up in his location and was temporarily stunned at the scale of what he was pulling into himself.

And suddenly there was a loud roaring sound. And the world came alight with fire right before her eyes.

Three gouts of flame sprayed forth from the small man as he hovered, one from each hand, and one from his mouth, and fanned out in an inferno before him.

Her eyepiece flared and she studied the info it gave her.

"MR. CHOI!" She tried to yell over the noise of his burning attack. "BEHIND Y-"

BOOM!

Lightning arced over the ship, making every hair on her head stand up with static as it did, and she watched in mute horror as it arced toward the largest source of magical energy it could find.

Right now that was him.

James felt the incoming surge behind him.

His right hand stopped spewing flame and let out a small pop that spun him around ever so slightly and he looked back to see the large white spot of the approaching lightning bolt. It was moving... well... like lightning, and even with his vision enhanced he knew he wasn't going to avoid it.

Luckily that had never been the plan. After all, his new sister in law had keyed him in to the fact that apparently lightning liked sources of magical energy.

He'd needed something to fight for a while now. And a storm seemed like a damn good outlet to unleash upon.

Images of the first fire elemental he'd ever fought popped into his mind. As did the image of Prince Alixan shielding him outside of Jadesport. And Veliry shielding a thermobaric artillery attack.

And, he'd never admit it, so did an angsty prince from one of his dad's favorite cartoons.

His right hand caught the bolt with his pointer and middle finger. It burned in a way that was oddly ice cold.

USE IT! He demanded of himself.

In his mind he devoured the energy and mixed it in with all the other energy he'd gathered in to fly and shoot fire. He used the impact to spin himself back the way he'd come. Then his numb right hand spread back out and fire bloomed from it once again, joining his other hand and his mouth.

And the blazing maelstrom that he'd been emitting before was amplified tenfold as the very power of the storm joined it.

The entire crew, or at least those present on the deck, watched this with slack jaws and wide eyes as the young man they'd all assumed was dead, became a human fire elemental in the sky.

Then, he began to move.

"By the serpents of the deeps." Xarina muttered to herself as she felt the dew on her face first warm, then evaporate entirely, then was replaced by sweat as the temperature near the ship began to climb.

She looked around, and sure enough the mist of the cloud seemed... lighter.

James flew forward, toward the front of the ship. He felt another swell of energy and turned to face it. This time he caught the bolt on his left leg, which made his flight falter for a moment before he recovered. Once again the fire intensified.

More! He thought. *Give me more!*

He turned his head ever so slightly as he felt magic building up on the ship, and saw the crew there beginning to spray flames of their own out from the ship deck.

He jetted down underneath the ship and was shocked to see that there were several large scorch marks on the bottom where Xarina and the crew HADN'T been able to defend it from the lightning. He felt another bolt building up now.

This one he caught in both hands, allowing the fire to stop temporarily as he focused on catching it. Once he had, he redirected it out of his mouth and did his best impersonation of a dragon.

Fire flowed out in a torrent that would have made Steve jealous if he hadn't been clamped onto his pen's walls for his life.

Oh god. He thought as he was reminded of his best friend and mount. *Sorry bout the lightning Steve.*

Then he went back to flying around the ship as a human flamethrower.

Thirty minutes later, and with the sky around the ship much clearer, James landed on the deck and flopped out on his belly with his arms and legs splayed. He had black veins forming around the corners of his mouth, though he couldn't see them. Once the crew had caught on and joined him in burning away the cloud he'd taken off in front of the ship and cleared out a few miles of the sky in front of it, making a corridor for it to fly through safely until they reached the end of the weather formation.

He stayed that way for a few minutes as he caught his breath.

I fought a storm and won. He thought to himself as he caught his breath. *And I did it in style.*

But when he rolled over and sat up there were no cheers. The crew didn't gather around and clap him on the shoulder or anything like that.

Instead they looked at him with what he thought might have been a bit of fear. Only Xarina approached him, and even she did so with apprehension on her face.

"Got it." He said as he got to his feet.

"Aye. That you did." She agreed as she reached out to steady him. "Well done."

"Everyone okay?" He asked.

"Aye. We're fine." She said. "But what the hell was that?"

"What?" He asked, confused. "I told you we could burn the cloud away."

"Yeah." She agreed. Then she gestured to the deck hands who were still emitting jets of fire from the ship to keep the cloud from rolling back in. "And WE did. You damn near got yourself killed." She pointed at the burns on his right hand, where long lightning pattern lines had formed starting at his finger tips. He hadn't even noticed them. "What was that with the lightning?" She asked.

He held it up and looked at it curiously. "What? I used the storm to fuel the spells against itself." He said.

He saw the look of concern in her face. "I've never heard of anyone doin' that." She admitted. "And what if it hadn't worked? What if instead you'd simply been knocked dead in the sky? What then?"

James shrugged. He hadn't really thought of it. "I don't know." He admitted. "Didn't really think that far ahead."

She jabbed him in the chest painfully. "That's part of the problem." She said angrily. "This is a ship. May be a weird sky ship built by a bunch of idiots. But it's still a ship. And you're a damn member of the royal family now. Even if its only by marriage you still have to THINK... before you act. You represent my father and the kingdom now. AND Amina."

As if on cue, Amina emerged from the door leading below. She still looked green around the gills.

"Is it..." She began. "Is it over?" Then she rushed over to the railing and vomited again.

"Go take care of your wife." Xarina said firmly as she began walking away, tucking the crystal and leather eye piece into a pouch on her belt as she did. "And next time you're thinkin' of leaping ass first into trouble; do us a favor and simply stay in your cabin."

James watched her go for a moment, then heard Amina retch again and rushed to her side.

"Yeah, you're welcome." James hissed over his shoulder at the departing princess.

He wasn't aware of the fact that she'd left out the part where his display of firepower had intimidated everyone who'd seen it. Herself included.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11emsi1/wait_is_this_just_gate_320/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (319/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11ayszi/wait_is_this_just_gate_318/) /
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Enjoy

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"Oh gods... make it-" Amina began as she clung to the edge of the latrine in their room. Then she stuck her head into the hole and spewed vomit for several seconds. "Make it stop." She said in a whimper before the ship rolled to the side, forcing her to brace herself on the wall.

There was a deafening boom as lightning flashed past the side of the ship outside and James struggled not to join her. Especially now that he could hear her throwing up again.

The air ship had been flying through the outer edge of the storm front for nearly four hours now. And James couldn't imagine how much worse it would have been if they'd been on an actual OCEAN ship down below.

He dipped a washcloth in the basin of water near his wife, doing what he could not to let the basin overflow as the ship rolled again, then rang it out and pressed it to the back of her neck as he pulled a zip-tie from one of his pockets and pulled her hair back before tying it into a pony tail. It wasn't perfect, and the zip-tie was less than ideal. But it would work.

"How...how long?" She began, then turned green as she held her stomach in. "How much longer?"

"I'll go ask." He said as he lurched out of the bathroom at an angle.

He staggered in a wide stance as he made his way down the corridor toward the stairs up. He passed Steve's pen, the poor drake spread as wide and as flat as he could be with his claws dug into the wood of the ships floor and wall, and paused long enough to tell the massive lizard to hold on a bit longer.

Then he managed to get up to the door to the top deck.

And saw nothing but grey mist.

"AFT SIDE!" Yelled the smoky voice of Amina's second youngest sister Xarina. "AFT SIDE YA DOLT!"

"Aye!" A voice shouted back.

There was a crack, and a flash of slightly blueish light as James felt magical energy discharge somewhere behind and above him.

KRAKOOM!

James instinctively ducked down inside the doorway as the sky went blindingly bright with light. His ears rang with the report of the lightning that had just blasted past them. Then Xarina staggered past him, almost forty five degrees askew, as she confidently crossed the deck of the ship. She wore a large leather patch over her right eye that held a large blue crystal in front of it. The crystal glowed a bit as she turned her head.

"FORWARD PORT!" She yelled out. "PROJECT IT!"

"Aye miss!" A different voice called. James felt the familiar magical buildup before there was another small lightning blast that he actually saw through the mist. It cast an eerie shadow around its caster as it flew out a few yards and then detonated.

KABOOM!

He practically threw himself back down the stairs and into the ship's hold as a massive bolt of NATURAL lightning immediately replaced the one the caster had sent out. It flew past the side of the ship, missing it by mere inches, or so it seemed to James.

"SKYWARD!" Xarina yelled frantically. "SKYWARD SKYWARD SKYWARD!"

Again the buildup of magical energy. But this time from all over the ship, and James saw the faint shimmer of a shield form over the-

KABOOM!

The shield flared as a hammer of lightning slammed into it from above and spidered out across its shimmering blue form. Someone cried out.

"HOLD YA BUNCH O' VATRIAN DIRT EATERS!" Xarina yelled. Then the lightning was gone again.

James staggered back up and out and toward the princess's voice. After a few moments of staggering drunkenly about he found her and latched onto her shoulder. She rounded on him with a manic expression on her face.

"What are you doin' here HERO!?" She asked. "Ye should be below with the rest."

"What the fuck is going on?" He asked.

Her eyepiece glared with blue light and she stepped over and past him.

"AFT SIDE AGAIN!" She yelled. "PORTWARD!"

"Aye!" One of the ship-hands yelled again. And this time James was braced for the lightning that flew past.

"Can't you see we're a touch busy?" She asked as he recovered. "Bloody Vatrians didn't even put in any dampening for their enchantments!" She said, more to herself than for his benefit. "We're attracting every stray lightning bolt the storm has to give. And it's got a lot."

"What?" James asked.

She glared at him as if he was an idiot. Then shouldered past him.

"STARBOARD SIDE!" She yelled.

Another "Aye!" Another spell, and another blast of lightning.

Then she looked back at him. "The Vatrians." She said, each word dripping with disgust. "Built a bloody flying ship. That's full o' magic. They didn't think of what would happen if a bloody magic ship got caught in a bleedin' storm!" She gestured at the grey mist of the cloud they were in. "Like oh... I don't know. THIS BLOODY STORM!"

Before James could react she waved her hand and a bolt of red lightning flew out past the front of the ship at an angle, then detonated into a spider web of similarly colored lightning that went every way except toward the ship.

KABOOM!

"Didn't even put any damned redirection tubing in place." She grumbled as she scanned around with the crystal eye piece.

"What do we do?" He asked as the ship rolled. He fell to a knee as his wolf hand dug into the ship's deck. Xarina simply listed in the other direction, her feet barely moving.

"Fuck can we do?" She asked rhetorically. Then she cupped her hands around her mouth. "STARBOARD!" Another lightning blast. "All we can do is keep redirecting them manually and hope the men hold out until we can get clear." She said grimly.

"Get clear?" He said curiously as he thought hard.

She cocked an eyebrow. "Yeah." She said in confusion. "Of the storm. Obviously."

"No." He said. "I mean..... What if we cleared the storm?"

"Yeah." She said with her arms wide. "THAT'S THE IDEA!" Then she turned as the gem lit up again. "PORT SIDE!"

Another report. More lightning.

"NO!" He yelled back. "I mean what if WE... Clear the storm ourselves?!?!"

"What?" She asked. "Like... make it go away? That's druidcraft." She scoffed. "Know any druids that strong?"

His face hardened for a moment as he thought of sarcastically replying. "Yeah. Yeah I do." And she seemed to read the thoughts there.

"You know what I mean." She said a bit more softly.

"Right." He said. "Still. How do you normally clear fog?"

"Light and heat." She said. "Helps to have a lot of both."

James gestured at the grey mist around them.

"A cloud is just fog that's up in the sky with a bunch of lightning in it." He said.

"Aye but this is a storm. It's massive." She shot back.

"Then we'd better dress to match." He said simply. And before she could react he began making his way over to the railing at the side of the ship.

"What?" She asked. "You'd have to blast out enough fire to-"

Then James jumped over the railing.

Xarina rushed over to the side, on the verge of yelling out "Man overboard!" as if it would matter a thousand feet above the ocean. Then there was a rapid popping noise, like firecrackers going off. Then James was hovering a few dozen yards out past the rapidly buzzing wings of the ship, which he'd fallen between when he'd jumped off. She could barely see him out in the thick mist, only able to track his location by the twin jets of magical energy emitting from his feet, and the gold glow around his eyes.

She felt magical energy build up in his location and was temporarily stunned at the scale of what he was pulling into himself.

And suddenly there was a loud roaring sound. And the world came alight with fire right before her eyes.

Three gouts of flame sprayed forth from the small man as he hovered, one from each hand, and one from his mouth, and fanned out in an inferno before him.

Her eyepiece flared and she studied the info it gave her.

"MR. CHOI!" She tried to yell over the noise of his burning attack. "BEHIND Y-"

BOOM!

Lightning arced over the ship, making every hair on her head stand up with static as it did, and she watched in mute horror as it arced toward the largest source of magical energy it could find.

Right now that was him.

James felt the incoming surge behind him.

His right hand stopped spewing flame and let out a small pop that spun him around ever so slightly and he looked back to see the large white spot of the approaching lightning bolt. It was moving... well... like lightning, and even with his vision enhanced he knew he wasn't going to avoid it.

Luckily that had never been the plan. After all, his new sister in law had keyed him in to the fact that apparently lightning liked sources of magical energy.

He'd needed something to fight for a while now. And a storm seemed like a damn good outlet to unleash upon.

Images of the first fire elemental he'd ever fought popped into his mind. As did the image of Prince Alixan shielding him outside of Jadesport. And Veliry shielding a thermobaric artillery attack.

And, he'd never admit it, so did an angsty prince from one of his dad's favorite cartoons.

His right hand caught the bolt with his pointer and middle finger. It burned in a way that was oddly ice cold.

USE IT! He demanded of himself.

In his mind he devoured the energy and mixed it in with all the other energy he'd gathered in to fly and shoot fire. He used the impact to spin himself back the way he'd come. Then his numb right hand spread back out and fire bloomed from it once again, joining his other hand and his mouth.

And the blazing maelstrom that he'd been emitting before was amplified tenfold as the very power of the storm joined it.

The entire crew, or at least those present on the deck, watched this with slack jaws and wide eyes as the young man they'd all assumed was dead, became a human fire elemental in the sky.

Then, he began to move.

"By the serpents of the deeps." Xarina muttered to herself as she felt the dew on her face first warm, then evaporate entirely, then was replaced by sweat as the temperature near the ship began to climb.

She looked around, and sure enough the mist of the cloud seemed... lighter.

James flew forward, toward the front of the ship. He felt another swell of energy and turned to face it. This time he caught the bolt on his left leg, which made his flight falter for a moment before he recovered. Once again the fire intensified.

More! He thought. *Give me more!*

He turned his head ever so slightly as he felt magic building up on the ship, and saw the crew there beginning to spray flames of their own out from the ship deck.

He jetted down underneath the ship and was shocked to see that there were several large scorch marks on the bottom where Xarina and the crew HADN'T been able to defend it from the lightning. He felt another bolt building up now.

This one he caught in both hands, allowing the fire to stop temporarily as he focused on catching it. Once he had, he redirected it out of his mouth and did his best impersonation of a dragon.

Fire flowed out in a torrent that would have made Steve jealous if he hadn't been clamped onto his pen's walls for his life.

Oh god. He thought as he was reminded of his best friend and mount. *Sorry bout the lightning Steve.*

Then he went back to flying around the ship as a human flamethrower.

Thirty minutes later, and with the sky around the ship much clearer, James landed on the deck and flopped out on his belly with his arms and legs splayed. He had black veins forming around the corners of his mouth, though he couldn't see them. Once the crew had caught on and joined him in burning away the cloud he'd taken off in front of the ship and cleared out a few miles of the sky in front of it, making a corridor for it to fly through safely until they reached the end of the weather formation.

He stayed that way for a few minutes as he caught his breath.

I fought a storm and won. He thought to himself as he caught his breath. *And I did it in style.*

But when he rolled over and sat up there were no cheers. The crew didn't gather around and clap him on the shoulder or anything like that.

Instead they looked at him with what he thought might have been a bit of fear. Only Xarina approached him, and even she did so with apprehension on her face.

"Got it." He said as he got to his feet.

"Aye. That you did." She agreed as she reached out to steady him. "Well done."

"Everyone okay?" He asked.

"Aye. We're fine." She said. "But what the hell was that?"

"What?" He asked, confused. "I told you we could burn the cloud away."

"Yeah." She agreed. Then she gestured to the deck hands who were still emitting jets of fire from the ship to keep the cloud from rolling back in. "And WE did. You damn near got yourself killed." She pointed at the burns on his right hand, where long lightning pattern lines had formed starting at his finger tips. He hadn't even noticed them. "What was that with the lightning?" She asked.

He held it up and looked at it curiously. "What? I used the storm to fuel the spells against itself." He said.

He saw the look of concern in her face. "I've never heard of anyone doin' that." She admitted. "And what if it hadn't worked? What if instead you'd simply been knocked dead in the sky? What then?"

James shrugged. He hadn't really thought of it. "I don't know." He admitted. "Didn't really think that far ahead."

She jabbed him in the chest painfully. "That's part of the problem." She said angrily. "This is a ship. May be a weird sky ship built by a bunch of idiots. But it's still a ship. And you're a damn member of the royal family now. Even if its only by marriage you still have to THINK... before you act. You represent my father and the kingdom now. AND Amina."

As if on cue, Amina emerged from the door leading below. She still looked green around the gills.

"Is it..." She began. "Is it over?" Then she rushed over to the railing and vomited again.

"Go take care of your wife." Xarina said firmly as she began walking away, tucking the crystal and leather eye piece into a pouch on her belt as she did. "And next time you're thinkin' of leaping ass first into trouble; do us a favor and simply stay in your cabin."

James watched her go for a moment, then heard Amina retch again and rushed to her side.

"Yeah, you're welcome." James hissed over his shoulder at the departing princess.

He wasn't aware of the fact that she'd left out the part where his display of firepower had intimidated everyone who'd seen it. Herself included.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11emqt0/wait_is_this_just_gate_320/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (318/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1151el4/wait_is_this_just_gate_317/)

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So, on the third day she took him shopping. They avoided all the places that they'd been to before, sticking to the parts of the city on the other side of the trade channel. At first they purchased simple things, some extra furnishings for their room on the air ship, a few sets of winter clothes for when their route took them a little further north and into cold weather. But then she took him to a part of town that she

hadn't actually been to in years. Not since Kela had found out that she was pregnant with her twins.

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While the King watched the video, only a little more than ten minutes when all was said and done, Vickers fished out an envelope with a letter inside. One that was eerily similar to the one he'd sent out a few months earlier.

"That all seems to line up." The King. "Albeit with what little we were capable of getting." He looked at the letter in Vickers' hands. "What's that?"

Vickers held it out and let the King take it.

"A chance to earn the Muck Marcher's loyalty... assuming it doesn't kill them." He said as the King read it over, his eyes widening as he did. "Plus it might earn a bit of favor with my government. And it would give

us a hell of a weapon against the Agency. Driscoll wants to go scorched earth on em. Aaaaand I kinda wanna let him."

"This...." The King said as he waved the letter at Vickers. "This is a mighty large gamble. Chief Vickers. And you want me to allow this to happen with two of the people who almost killed my daughter? Who nearly killed the Arch Mage. Your own captain?"

Vickers held his hands up in mock surrender. "Never said it wasn't a risk. Plus, like I said, it'll probably kill em. And that's assuming it even works at all. That's why I didn't sign MY name to it."

King Farrick looked, and sure enough the signature block at the bottom was blank.

"I just figured it was an option. And if the Toolies can get us a location, a couple of wolfed up muck marchers with a bone to pick might be a mighty nice ace in the hole." Vickers said. "But I'll leave that decision to you."

The king looked back at the image on Vickers' phone one more time before sliding it back across from him. He couldn't deny the anger in Driscoll's eyes. And He'd already seen what the man could do with no idea what was going on and missing an arm.

"I'll consider it." He said firmly. "But I don't like the idea of THEM having the same kind of power you do." He left out the part where he barely liked Vickers having that power.

"That's all I'm asking sir." Vickers replied as he stood up and began making his way toward the door. "I'll keep you updated on the suit data."

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Samantha walked through the hall nervously.

She was about halfway back to her "human" form now. But even still, she could hear and smell the people waiting in the room at the end of the hall waiting for them. The room marked "Conference Hall B". She kept glancing around nervously from within her hood, as if ensuring that Dr. Munro was still there. She was, and she smiled at Samantha each time she looked her way.

She stopped in her tracks as she got within a few feet of the door. Dr. Munro stopped as well.

"Is everything okay Samantha?" She asked.

"Is this..." She began. "Is this really a good idea?" She could tell that all the chatter inside the room had quieted, and knew that all eyes would be on her as soon as she entered. "Do you really think this is okay?"

Dr. Munro looked back and forth between her and the door a few times as she thought of what to say.

"They're like you." She said finally. "Some of them have embraced their change a little more easily. But they're all just as lost. Just as alone, even when they aren't. And all in need of someone they can ACTUALLY relate to."

Samantha couldn't deny that she felt alone. Even with the doctor helping her. With her father only a phone call away. With the hospital staff slowly but surely becoming more comfortable around her. She felt like she was on her own.

She stepped forward, grasped the door handle and pulled.

And as she stepped in eight sets of golden canine eyes just like hers looked toward her, and locked on her own. She felt the fur on her neck and back stand on end.

They all stayed that way for a moment. Then a large, slightly gray furred, wolf near the far end of the room spoke.

"You're the one that had the shield?" They asked in a slightly German accented voice. "The uh... Wonder Woman?"

She looked at Dr. Munro, though she kept the other werewolves in her peripheral vision almost on instinct. Dr. Munro nodded.

"I.... was." She said hesitantly.

The large gray wolf nodded at her answer. "Thank you for stopping the big one." He said after a moment. "Sorry you turned back."

Some of the other wolves, though not all of them, were nodding agreement.

"Thanks." She said, unsure of what else there was to say.

"Did...." A small wolf, that must have only been a young teen at most, asked from a few seats away from her. "Did that... God lady... talk to you too?" Behind the young girl were two people that Samantha assumed where her parents.

"Um.... yeah." Samantha admitted.

"She seemed mean." The young wolf said. "I didn't like her."

"Me neither." Samantha agreed. Then she pulled up the empty seat near her and sat down. "I guess you said no to what she told you to do?"

The young girl looked back at her parents. "My mom and dad said not to listen to people I don't know. Especially if they seem mean."

Samantha looked at the two parents and smiled.

"That's good." She said. Then she looked around at everyone else. "Did you all speak with her too?"

They all nodded and looked around at each other too.

"Well." She said after a moment. "SHE... whoever she was... wasn't the one that gave me the Wonder Woman powers."

Even the few werewolves who hadn't been taking part in the conversation up until that point, perked up at that.

"That was a different.... GOD." She finished.

The handful of other doctors in the room looked at Dr. Munro with raised eyebrows. She simply gestured for them to pay attention as the wolves began to talk in earnest. And she was happy to see how quickly Samantha was opening up compared to when she'd first woken back up in the hospital.

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/11dmtyp/wait_is_this_just_gate_319/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1151ctm/wait_is_this_just_gate_317/) /
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"That all seems to line up." The King. "Albeit with what little we were capable of getting." He looked at the letter in Vickers' hands. "What's that?"

Vickers held it out and let the King take it.

"A chance to earn the Muck Marcher's loyalty... assuming it doesn't kill them." He said as the King read it over, his eyes widening as he did. "Plus it might earn a bit of favor with my government. And it would give us a hell of a weapon against the Agency. Driscoll wants to go scorched earth on em. Aaaaand I kinda wanna let him."

"This...." The King said as he waved the letter at Vickers. "This is a mighty large gamble. Chief Vickers. And you want me to allow this to happen with two of the people who almost killed my daughter? Who nearly killed the Arch Mage. Your own captain?"

Vickers held his hands up in mock surrender. "Never said it wasn't a risk. Plus, like I said, it'll probably kill em. And that's assuming it even works at all. That's why I didn't sign MY name to it."

King Farrick looked, and sure enough the signature block at the bottom was blank.

"I just figured it was an option. And if the Toolies can get us a location, a couple of wolfed up muck marchers with a bone to pick might be a mighty nice ace in the hole." Vickers said. "But I'll leave that decision to you."

The king looked back at the image on Vickers' phone one more time before sliding it back across from him. He couldn't deny the anger in Driscoll's eyes. And He'd already seen what the man could do with no idea what was going on and missing an arm.

"I'll consider it." He said firmly. "But I don't like the idea of THEM having the same kind of power you do." He left out the part where he barely liked Vickers having that power.

"That's all I'm asking sir." Vickers replied as he stood up and began making his way toward the door. "I'll keep you updated on the suit data."

\------------------------

Samantha walked through the hall nervously.

She was about halfway back to her "human" form now. But even still, she could hear and smell the people waiting in the room at the end of the hall waiting for them. The room marked "Conference Hall B". She kept glancing around nervously from within her hood, as if ensuring that Dr. Munro was still there. She was, and she smiled at Samantha each time she looked her way.

She stopped in her tracks as she got within a few feet of the door. Dr. Munro stopped as well.

"Is everything okay Samantha?" She asked.

"Is this..." She began. "Is this really a good idea?" She could tell that all the chatter inside the room had quieted, and knew that all eyes would be on her as soon as she entered. "Do you really think this is okay?"

Dr. Munro looked back and forth between her and the door a few times as she thought of what to say.

"They're like you." She said finally. "Some of them have embraced their change a little more easily. But they're all just as lost. Just as alone, even when they aren't. And all in need of someone they can ACTUALLY relate to."

Samantha couldn't deny that she felt alone. Even with the doctor helping her. With her father only a phone call away. With the hospital staff slowly but surely becoming more comfortable around her. She felt like she was on her own.

She stepped forward, grasped the door handle and pulled.

And as she stepped in eight sets of golden canine eyes just like hers looked toward her, and locked on her own. She felt the fur on her neck and back stand on end.

They all stayed that way for a moment. Then a large, slightly gray furred, wolf near the far end of the room spoke.

"You're the one that had the shield?" They asked in a slightly German accented voice. "The uh... Wonder Woman?"

She looked at Dr. Munro, though she kept the other werewolves in her peripheral vision almost on instinct. Dr. Munro nodded.

"I.... was." She said hesitantly.

The large gray wolf nodded at her answer. "Thank you for stopping the big one." He said after a moment. "Sorry you turned back."

Some of the other wolves, though not all of them, were nodding agreement.

"Thanks." She said, unsure of what else there was to say.

"Did...." A small wolf, that must have only been a young teen at most, asked from a few seats away from her. "Did that... God lady... talk to you too?" Behind the young girl were two people that Samantha assumed where her parents.

"Um.... yeah." Samantha admitted.

"She seemed mean." The young wolf said. "I didn't like her."

"Me neither." Samantha agreed. Then she pulled up the empty seat near her and sat down. "I guess you said no to what she told you to do?"

The young girl looked back at her parents. "My mom and dad said not to listen to people I don't know. Especially if they seem mean."

Samantha looked at the two parents and smiled.

"That's good." She said. Then she looked around at everyone else. "Did you all speak with her too?"

They all nodded and looked around at each other too.

"Well." She said after a moment. "SHE... whoever she was... wasn't the one that gave me the Wonder Woman powers."

Even the few werewolves who hadn't been taking part in the conversation up until that point, perked up at that.

"That was a different.... GOD." She finished.

The handful of other doctors in the room looked at Dr. Munro with raised eyebrows. She simply gestured for them to pay attention as the wolves began to talk in earnest. And she was happy to see how quickly Samantha was opening up compared to when she'd first woken back up in the hospital.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/11dmsdw/wait_is_this_just_gate_319/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (317/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1145sfi/wait_is_this_just_gate_316/)

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But she knew better.

She'd seen James at low points before. She'd seen him hurt physically until he was on the brink of death. But she knew this was different. And she knew that there wasn't much that could be done about it. This was no simple wound. Joey had been part of the foundation of her husband's life, and to have him gone was to have his entire world destabilized in a way that couldn't just be repaired. It was a wound that only time would close. Though it would never truly heal.

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"The only one who wasn't was father. And maybe Alixan." She agreed. "For the rest of us it was just confusing and scary."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (317/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/1145irw/wait_is_this_just_gate_316/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (316/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/113cg0l/wait_is_this_just_gate_315/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Vickers has a backstory of his own.

Enjoy.

\~

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1151el4/wait_is_this_just_gate_317/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (316/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/113ce0v/wait_is_this_just_gate_315/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Vickers has a backstory of his own.

Enjoy.

\~

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Wait, is this just GATE? (315/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/112jgq7/wait_is_this_just_gate_314/)

Writer's note: Yes. I know the transition between last chapters two sections was a bit whiplash inducing. Like I said; I needed some levity. The feels have been too strong lately. And now I have to make it all sad again.

Oh yeah, you also learn a bit about the rest of the world.

FUCKING ENJOY!!!!

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"Mister Batista." The King said as he shuffled through the papers. "How are your compatriots doing with adjusting to their new lives?"

Batty pulled up the notes he'd taken on the spare tablet that he'd been given to help with the task of keeping an eye on the "civilian" personnel that had been conditionally released after the desert battle.

"Um. They are doing well sir." He replied as he checked the notes. "Some minor complaints. Basic stuff that I've already forwarded to your staff. A few of the scientists are asking for permission to have some of their equipment to study the plant life they've seen around the castle. I've checked, nothing that would be a threat." He assured the King, who had cocked an eyebrow at the request. "Mostly just analysis gear. Other than that life goes on." He cringed a bit as he said the last sentence.

King Farrick simply nodded. "I'll approve what I can." He said. "How are YOU doing?" He asked.

"I'm good sir." Batty replied with a bit more cheer in his voice. "The quarters you've provided are more than enough for me." He stood and made a show of twisting and bending forward a bit. "Stomach is all good now."

"Glad to hear." The King said with a smile. "But what I meant was; how are you doing with the news about the Chois?"

Batty's smile fled quickly as he bit his lip a bit and nodded.

"It's rough." He admitted. "I checked on Mrs. Choi. She's doing okay. You know... relatively. Haven't been able to get to Jim just yet. I guess he was pretty tore up.... understandably."

"Well." The King began. "I was told that he's up and moving again. Maybe check up on him in the morning. I know I will."

Batty nodded. "Yes sir. Thanks for letting me know." Then he sat back down and listened in as the King turned to the other people present.

He turned to one of the soldiers who had a small bird's crest engraved into their pauldron.

"News?" He asked simply.

The soldier stood up with a nod. "Aye your majesty." He replied eagerly. "You already know that General Sigbert has reported the blighted area being clear." He said. The King nodded with a small wave of his hand telling the man to keep going. "News from the scouts following the Blight Entity's path through the southern lands found what they think was a blight zone in the mountains. Or, barring that, the area where the beast emerged. Several mountains have disappeared with minimal signs of debris left behind."

He moved forward, unrolling a map that he'd brought with him and placing it on the King's desk. It showed the land in question, with several large markings that mocked up the damage it had done to the Druid forest and several more for where it had destroyed the small villages and drained the lake. The area that the soldier indicated for the mountains showed large X-marks through several of the mountains.

"They sent griffin parties over the fallen mountains, careful not to fly into any patches if there were any of course, and could see no sign of further destruction beyond the range." He shrugged aand shook his head a bit. "But there were also no blight patches either."

"And what of our neighbors?" The King prodded. "We knew there was one patch beyond the Krag. And also in your husband's homeland Ferria."

Princess Ferria stood up and bowed, much to Her brother and sister's dismay as they each rolled their eyes.

"Tanier received word late yesterday that the most heavily monitored affected area in Vatria has likewise been emptied of its blight." She said. "The scholars studying it at the time. Some of whom were killed by what happened unfortunately, witnessed the blight accelerating southwest, and downward, at a rapid rate before disappearing into the ground." She tilted her head a bit. "They are currently dealing with several incursions from the Deep Dark as a result of the tunnels that

the event created. And three scholars were in the paths of the anomalies when they began moving."

Everyone bristled at that. They all knew what happened to people who disappeared into the blight. Or at least the ones before the battle of Jadesport.

"And to the south?" The King asked.

Alixan stood and nodded. "Our spies in the south have reported increased agitation among the zealots around the area where their patch was. Unfortunately they've also increased their military presence there as a result so we haven't gotten eyes on just yet." He shrugged and grinned. "But I have faith in our people. And if Tanier's message is true then it makes sense. They'd likely be dealing with their own paths to the Dark. And they hate that place."

"And the Orkkrag?" The King prompted.

"The Chieftan hasn't reported anything. Though it's entirely possible that that is a simple result of the miasma being thick this time of year. Visibility is low." The prince replied.

"Well than, until we get reports in from our other ambassadors and agents, we shall have to ASSUME that the younger Choi has saved us all." The King said solemnly. He left out the part where their countries natural order might begin to fray. Nor did he mention the fact that Veliry had hinted at the salvation only being temporary. But that was a problem for later.

"We shall have to build him a monument." Marcos said from where he sat nearby.

Several of the people in the room murmured their agreement.

"In time." The King said with a small nod. "The Chois are heartbroken, and in mourning. We can come up with something once they've had time to mend their hearts a bit."

Everyone went silent at that.

After a moment he spoke up again. "In the mean time, young mister Choi and Arch Mage Veliry discovered a method of transiting between two locations near instantaneously. There's still some refining and experimenting to do. But I'd like to set up a location where we can use it to transport important people and materials between the different cities of the country." He turned to Ferria. "Let your husband know that we've outdone his flying canoes." He said with a mischievous grin.

Ferria rolled her eyes and sighed. "He's going to be livid." She said in response.

\----------

When James finally emerged from the room where they'd stored Joey's body, it was already nearing dawn. He also saw Amina sitting in one of the chairs typically reserved for the people that came down here to tend to the dead. She was snoring a little as her head leaned back against the wall.

He hadn't intended to take so long. But when he'd first entered the room and seen his brother's body on the wooden table that was enchanted to preserve it and keep it cold, he'd frozen.

His brother had been taken by the blight. Had also been infused with a good chunk of the druidic power of the Five after using the tendrils of blight to fuse Veliry's antlers with his own skull. Had undergone some kind of magical detonation that expelled both powers, and his soul, or something like it anyways. And then had fallen several thousand feet before Prince Alixan had managed to catch him at the last second.

And yet when James had first walked in, he almost could have believed that Joey had just fallen asleep on an oddly glowing table.

He'd approached slowly, as if he thought he might wake him from the sleep, and when he'd touched his brother's shoulder he'd been reminded of the reality.

Joey's body had been so cold. Almost cold enough to freeze, though not quite.

He'd pulled up one of the stools tucked under the table and sat down, taking Joey's hand as he did and holding it in both of his.

He'd looked up and away from his little brother as he'd gathered himself. He'd struggled, and failed, to hold his tears back as he finally spoke.

"Mom always used to tell me how much you looked up to me." He'd began. "How... I was your hero. She told me one time- and I hadn't even realized it until she said it, but she told me.... that any time you were in trouble.... or scared.... I.... was the first person you went to for help. Not her. And not dad, though I guess you were too young when he went away for that one to count." He paused as he wiped his eyes with one hand, not letting go with the other. He shook his head a bit as he continued. "I never got a chance to tell her.....To tell you.... That you were mine."

He'd wanted to tell Joey that for years. But brotherly rivalry, and simple emotional ignorance, had kept it from happening. And now it was too late.

"The hardest part of joining the Army wasn't basic training." He continued. "It wasn't shaving every day. Or staying in shape or anything." He squeezed the cold hand that was in his. "It was knowing that it would probably upset you. That... That I wouldn't be there to be that safety net for you anymore." He took a deep breath. "But I also knew that you NEEDED that to grow. I'd watched.... Every time I helped

you learn something you were struggling with. Or helped you figure out how to recognize a social cue... I saw you Jojo. I saw you trying SO hard... to move forward."

He paused to catch his breath, and suck in some of the snot that was slowly dripping from his nose.

"And you were my hero." He said, knowing that it was years later than it should have been. He nodded as he looked over at his brothers face and reached to tousle his hair one last time.

"And now you're everyone else's too." He nodded and looked up, as if looking at the sky where his brother's soul, his essence, wrestled with a power that was so far beyond him it was laughable.

"I know you can do it." He said to nobody present. "I.... KNOW.... you can do it."

Then he looked down and rested his head against his brother's chest.

"Please do it." He said softly, almost in a whisper.

And he'd stayed that way for a long time before he could summon the strength to release the hand and leave the room.

He'd turned at the last moment and looked back for just a second.

But he didn't say it.

Wherever he was out there. James was certain that his brother knew, just how much he and their mother loved him. And how much they would keep loving him. No matter what happened.

Then he'd stepped out the door.

There was no feeling of gathering strength. No sense of relief. Nothing that would require a swell of emotional music in a movie.

It was simply a grieving brother stepping through a door and closing it behind him.

James was the only one who might have perceived any change.

Because to him, everything seemed just a bit less bright.

Then he scooped up his new wife in his arms, and walked her through the castle to their room so they could get some actual proper, restful, sleep.

And he tried not to think of how closely the sensation of carrying her reminded him of how he'd carried his brother.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/1145sfi/wait_is_this_just_gate_316/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (315/?)

[Previous (mildly NSFW)](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/112jfjb/wait_is_this_just_gate_314/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yes. I know the transition between last chapters two sections was a bit whiplash inducing. Like I said; I needed some levity. The feels have been too strong lately. And now I have to make it all sad again.

Oh yeah, you also learn a bit about the rest of the world.

FUCKING ENJOY!!!!

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"Mister Batista." The King said as he shuffled through the papers. "How are your compatriots doing with adjusting to their new lives?"

Batty pulled up the notes he'd taken on the spare tablet that he'd been given to help with the task of keeping an eye on the "civilian" personnel that had been conditionally released after the desert battle.

"Um. They are doing well sir." He replied as he checked the notes. "Some minor complaints. Basic stuff that I've already forwarded to your staff. A few of the scientists are asking for permission to have some of their equipment to study the plant life they've seen around the castle. I've checked, nothing that would be a threat." He assured the King, who had cocked an eyebrow at the request. "Mostly just analysis gear. Other than that life goes on." He cringed a bit as he said the last sentence.

King Farrick simply nodded. "I'll approve what I can." He said. "How are YOU doing?" He asked.

"I'm good sir." Batty replied with a bit more cheer in his voice. "The quarters you've provided are more than enough for me." He stood and made a show of twisting and bending forward a bit. "Stomach is all good now."

"Glad to hear." The King said with a smile. "But what I meant was; how are you doing with the news about the Chois?"

Batty's smile fled quickly as he bit his lip a bit and nodded.

"It's rough." He admitted. "I checked on Mrs. Choi. She's doing okay. You know... relatively. Haven't been able to get to Jim just yet. I guess he was pretty tore up.... understandably."

"Well." The King began. "I was told that he's up and moving again. Maybe check up on him in the morning. I know I will."

Batty nodded. "Yes sir. Thanks for letting me know." Then he sat back down and listened in as the King turned to the other people present.

He turned to one of the soldiers who had a small bird's crest engraved into their pauldron.

"News?" He asked simply.

The soldier stood up with a nod. "Aye your majesty." He replied eagerly. "You already know that General Sigbert has reported the blighted area being clear." He said. The King nodded with a small wave of his hand telling the man to keep going. "News from the scouts following the Blight Entity's path through the southern lands found what they think was a blight zone in the mountains. Or, barring that, the area where the beast emerged. Several mountains have disappeared with minimal signs of debris left behind."

He moved forward, unrolling a map that he'd brought with him and placing it on the King's desk. It showed the land in question, with several large markings that mocked up the damage it had done to the Druid forest and several more for where it had destroyed the small villages and drained the lake. The area that the soldier indicated for the mountains showed large X-marks through several of the mountains.

"They sent griffin parties over the fallen mountains, careful not to fly into any patches if there were any of course, and could see no sign of further destruction beyond the range." He shrugged aand shook his head a bit. "But there were also no blight patches either."

"And what of our neighbors?" The King prodded. "We knew there was one patch beyond the Krag. And also in your husband's homeland Ferria."

Princess Ferria stood up and bowed, much to Her brother and sister's dismay as they each rolled their eyes.

"Tanier received word late yesterday that the most heavily monitored affected area in Vatria has likewise been emptied of its blight." She said. "The scholars studying it at the time. Some of whom were killed by what happened unfortunately, witnessed the blight accelerating southwest, and downward, at a rapid rate before disappearing into the ground." She tilted her head a bit. "They are currently dealing with several incursions from the Deep Dark as a result of the tunnels that the event created. And three scholars were in the paths of the anomalies when they began moving."

Everyone bristled at that. They all knew what happened to people who disappeared into the blight. Or at least the ones before the battle of Jadesport.

"And to the south?" The King asked.

Alixan stood and nodded. "Our spies in the south have reported increased agitation among the zealots around the area where their patch was. Unfortunately they've also increased their military presence there as a

result so we haven't gotten eyes on just yet." He shrugged and grinned. "But I have faith in our people. And if Tanier's message is true then it makes sense. They'd likely be dealing with their own paths to the Dark. And they hate that place."

"And the Orkkrag?" The King prompted.

"The Chieftan hasn't reported anything. Though it's entirely possible that that is a simple result of the miasma being thick this time of year. Visibility is low." The prince replied.

"Well than, until we get reports in from our other ambassadors and agents, we shall have to ASSUME that the younger Choi has saved us all." The King said solemnly. He left out the part where their countries natural order might begin to fray. Nor did he mention the fact that Veliry had hinted at the salvation only being temporary. But that was a problem for later.

"We shall have to build him a monument." Marcos said from where he sat nearby.

Several of the people in the room murmured their agreement.

"In time." The King said with a small nod. "The Chois are heartbroken, and in mourning. We can come up with something once they've had time to mend their hearts a bit."

Everyone went silent at that.

After a moment he spoke up again. "In the mean time, young mister Choi and Arch Mage Veliry discovered a method of transiting between two locations near instantaneously. There's still some refining and experimenting to do. But I'd like to set up a location where we can use it to transport important people and materials between the different cities of the country." He turned to Ferria. "Let your husband know that we've outdone his flying canoes." He said with a mischievous grin.

Ferria rolled her eyes and sighed. "He's going to be livid." She said in response.

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When James finally emerged from the room where they'd stored Joey's body, it was already nearing dawn. He also saw Amina sitting in one of the chairs typically reserved for the people that came down here to tend to the dead. She was snoring a little as her head leaned back against the wall.

He hadn't intended to take so long. But when he'd first entered the room and seen his brother's body on the wooden table that was enchanted to preserve it and keep it cold, he'd frozen.

His brother had been taken by the blight. Had also been infused with a good chunk of the druidic power of the Five after using the tendrils of

blight to fuse Veliry's antlers with his own skull. Had undergone some kind of magical detonation that expelled both powers, and his soul, or something like it anyways. And then had fallen several thousand feet before Prince Alixan had managed to catch him at the last second.

And yet when James had first walked in, he almost could have believed that Joey had just fallen asleep on an oddly glowing table.

He'd approached slowly, as if he thought he might wake him from the sleep, and when he'd touched his brother's shoulder he'd been reminded of the reality.

Joey's body had been so cold. Almost cold enough to freeze, though not quite.

He'd pulled up one of the stools tucked under the table and sat down, taking Joey's hand as he did and holding it in both of his.

He'd looked up and away from his little brother as he'd gathered himself. He'd struggled, and failed, to hold his tears back as he finally spoke.

"Mom always used to tell me how much you looked up to me." He'd began. "How... I was your hero. She told me one time- and I hadn't even realized it until she said it, but she told me.... that any time you were in trouble.... or scared.... I.... was the first person you went to for help. Not her. And not dad, though I guess you were too young when he went away for that one to count." He paused as he wiped his eyes with one hand, not letting go with the other. He shook his head a bit as he continued. "I never got a chance to tell her.....To tell you.... That you were mine."

He'd wanted to tell Joey that for years. But brotherly rivalry, and simple emotional ignorance, had kept it from happening. And now it was too late.

"The hardest part of joining the Army wasn't basic training." He continued. "It wasn't shaving every day. Or staying in shape or anything." He squeezed the cold hand that was in his. "It was knowing that it would probably upset you. That... That I wouldn't be there to be that safety net for you anymore." He took a deep breath. "But I also knew that you NEEDED that to grow. I'd watched.... Every time I helped you learn something you were struggling with. Or helped you figure out how to recognize a social cue... I saw you Jojo. I saw you trying SO hard... to move forward."

He paused to catch his breath, and suck in some of the snot that was slowly dripping from his nose.

"And you were my hero." He said, knowing that it was years later than it should have been. He nodded as he looked over at his brothers face and reached to tousle his hair one last time.

"And now you're everyone else's too." He nodded and looked up, as if looking at the sky where his brother's soul, his essence, wrestled with a power that was so far beyond him it was laughable.

"I know you can do it." He said to nobody present. "I.... KNOW.... you can do it."

Then he looked down and rested his head against his brother's chest.

"Please do it." He said softly, almost in a whisper.

And he'd stayed that way for a long time before he could summon the strength to release the hand and leave the room.

He'd turned at the last moment and looked back for just a second.

But he didn't say it.

Wherever he was out there. James was certain that his brother knew, just how much he and their mother loved him. And how much they would keep loving him. No matter what happened.

Then he'd stepped out the door.

There was no feeling of gathering strength. No sense of relief. Nothing that would require a swell of emotional music in a movie.

It was simply a grieving brother stepping through a door and closing it behind him.

James was the only one who might have perceived any change.

Because to him, everything seemed just a bit less bright.

Then he scooped up his new wife in his arms, and walked her through the castle to their room so they could get some actual proper, restful, sleep.

And he tried not to think of how closely the sensation of carrying her reminded him of how he'd carried his brother.

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Also you finally get to see Vickers joke a bit. It's about time.

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By the time James managed to get fed, bathed, dressed, and over to the healing ward it was almost sun down.

His mother was lying in one of the private rooms, a comfort afforded by her comradery with the other healers, and the fact that everyone knew what had happened and knew she needed space.

James entered slowly and quietly. He wasn't sneaking, he simply didn't want to wake his mother if she was sleeping. But as he released Amina's helping hand and closed the door behind him he was surprised to see that she was awake and sitting up.

He was also surprised to see how exhausted she looked despite being awake. She'd had a handful of greys in her hair for the past five years or so. But as he looked now he saw streaks of the grey that looked to be fighting for dominance of his mother's hairdo. The bags under her eyes, a result of years of long and late shifts at her job, seemed deeper and darker. Had they always been that way and he just hadn't noticed? If he looked in a mirror would he see similar signs of weariness on his own face, just to a lesser degree?

But those questions weren't important.

His mother held her arms out without saying a word, in a gesture that any child would recognize from their parents, and James walked as quickly as he could and wrapped his arms around her. Were her arms always so thin? And when had he started crying?

"Oh mijo." She said softly as she patted the back of his head.

He tried to say something, but it came out in a choking sob.

"I know mijo." She said. He felt her shudder as she took a breath. "I know."

"I lost Jojo mom." He said between breaths. She just kept patting at his head and stroking his back like she had when he'd been a child. "I lost Joey."

They stayed that way for a while, a mother and son doing what they could to find solace in each others embrace even though there was someone missing. It took time, but eventually James was able to get the sobbing, and his breathing, under control. His mother reached over to the table near her bed and grabbed a small towel that was there and helped him clean himself up.

When he was finally able to sit up she simply placed a hand over his and looked at him with eyes that spoke to the depths of sorrow she was feeling.

"Tell me what happened mijo." She said. "Tell me how everyone started calling my youngest son a hero."

And as James finished wiping the tears from his cheeks, that was exactly what he did. And before he was finished he called through the door and Amina opened it before rolling Veliry in. He watched his mother intently as she let the information sink in for a moment. He watched as she struggled to keep the tears from flowing again, and his own emerged as he saw her lose the fight and begin sobbing as she held her arms out to Veliry much like she had for him only minutes before.

James made as silent of an exit as he could as the two women gushed over the news that Veliry had just revealed and stepped outside with Amina.

"Are you okay?" She asked as she took his hand. "How's your mother?'

He shook his head. "I don't think either of us will ever be okay." He admitted. "But my mom's stronger than I'll ever be."

Amina nodded and pulled him into a gentle hug. She hadn't said anything, but it was nice having him up and on his feet again.

"Come on." She said. "Let's go get you some more food and go to bed." She tugged at his hand to lead him. But James stayed rooted to his spot.

"No." He said softly, but firmly. "Can you..... Can you take me to see him?" He took a deep breath as he looked up and away. "Can you take me to see Joey?"

"James we can do that tomorrow." She said. "You need to rest, and regain your strength."

"Amina." He said, his tone shifting to one of mild anger, or at least annoyance. "Please. I just.... I need to see him."

She looked at him for a moment, then reluctantly nodded. "Okay." She said and began leading him through the castle down to the room that functioned as their morgue.

And James followed her with eyes that focused on nothing.

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It still messed with him that he could do that without anything except the small bit of moonlight coming through the small window on the opposite side of the room.

"I've already been gone a whole week longer than was expected." Atrafar said as she ran her clawed fingers across the fur over his abdominal muscles. Vickers flinched a little at the slight tickle it caused. His claws even emerged a bit more from it.

Shit. He thought. *Can't attack just because someone touched my stomach. I'll never hear the end of it.*

"That's fair." He said instead. "Guess the whole 'our world almost got devoured by a monster' thing can only buy you so much extra time."

"I also have to give my report on that too." She said as she rested her head on his chest. She huffed a bit and he looked at her past the book.

"What?" He asked.

Her head turned and looked up at him, and he noticed that her hackles were just a little bit puffed up. His rose just a touch in an unconscious reaction to the aggressive body language.

"We were just talking about how its my last night here for Goddess knows how long." She said as she sat up, letting him see her naked form as the blankets fell off of it. "And you're reading a book about rivers and lakes."

"And swamps." He said with a slight grin as he set the book aside.

"Oh." She said. "Well if its got swamps then never mind. Clearly that's more important."

Vickers rolled his eyes a bit.

"I'll have you know that swamps are some of the most important ecosystems out there." He said as he lifted her up, his newly massive hands almost fully encompassing her waist as he did, and set her directly on his lap. "They prevent floods."

"Nonsense. Levees do that." She said with a look of superiority. "And what in the hells is an ecosystem?"

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"Enough jokes my little cat boy." She said as she gripped one of his ears and yanked his head back, causing him to snarl in surprise. "Also, this time you at least write me from time to time."

Vickers flicked her nose. The werewolf's hand immediately let go of him and clamped over her snout.

"Bad doggy." He said. "I.... am a cat....MAN."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (313/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10z3ksy/wait_is_this_just_gate_312/)

Writer's note:

James before: I'm on a mission from God(s). And I have no idea what I'm doing about it.

James now: [*NEW PLAN!*](https://tenor.com/view/liam-neeson-call-i-will-find-you-i-will-kill-you-gif-17738720)

Enjoy.

\~

James listened to the "God" tell him the tale of what had happened between him, the other two gods, and both Joey and Veliry in the druid forest.

It didn't forgive anything that had happened, at least not in his mind. It didn't make the pain of losing his brother any easier. But it clarified things.

And there were two small nuggets of hope hidden within the retelling.

Firstly: Veliry was, barring anything unexpected, practically guaranteed to be pregnant with Joey's child. They'd only spent one, drunken and likely confused and clumsy, night together. But a confluence of various magical powers, and a few moments of near omniscience about the living beings around her had ensured her that it had happened.

Secondly, and more upsetting than that, Defiance had implied that Joey wasn't "gone" all the way.

James had grilled the god when he'd made the implication. Had refused to listen to anything else at all until Defiance had clarified what they'd meant by it.

Defiance hadn't acknowledged any of the things James had thought at it. But after a few minutes of James literally(?) thinking "Lalalalalalalalala!" in his mind, the god had put on an annoyed expression and told James that she KNEW James was ignoring anything not related to his brother.

Apparently the deity wasn't ALLOWED to speak of it directly. But they had gone on to warn James that there was a small chance, small enough that it was barely worth thinking of, that Joseph Choi could return some day.

He'd be fighting against the will and soul of the Cleanser as they traveled through the cosmos. And there was no knowing how long that would last. But regardless of who won the fight, some day the entity would be back.

Only then would James know the fate of his little brother's soul. And regardless of the outcome, his brother would never be the same person as before.

"I can't effect the outcome of that fight." Defiance had said as she'd stood up and dusted off the spot on James's bed that she'd been sitting on. "The Cleanser isn't my beast and I'm already being censured. Even I know which fights step back from." She'd admitted. "And if I tell you any more than I have, then someone-" She pointed up into the sky. "will take notice and come to haul me back off to the padded room with the tasty windows."

James simply stared up as he had been forced to the entire conversation, his body still locked in place.

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After ten minutes or so, and once Veliry had had a chance to discretely wipe her nose with her sleeve, they broke the hug and James sat back on the bed.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (313/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note:

James before: I'm on a mission from God(s). And I have no idea what I'm doing about it.

James now: [*NEW PLAN!*](https://tenor.com/view/liam-neeson-call-i-will-find-you-i-will-kill-you-gif-17738720)

Enjoy.

\~

James listened to the "God" tell him the tale of what had happened between him, the other two gods, and both Joey and Veliry in the druid forest.

It didn't forgive anything that had happened, at least not in his mind. It didn't make the pain of losing his brother any easier. But it clarified things.

And there were two small nuggets of hope hidden within the retelling.

Firstly: Veliry was, barring anything unexpected, practically guaranteed to be pregnant with Joey's child. They'd only spent one, drunken and likely confused and clumsy, night together. But a confluence of various magical powers, and a few moments of near omniscience about the living beings around her had ensured her that it had happened.

Secondly, and more upsetting than that, Defiance had implied that Joey wasn't "gone" all the way.

James had grilled the god when he'd made the implication. Had refused to listen to anything else at all until Defiance had clarified what they'd meant by it.

Defiance hadn't acknowledged any of the things James had thought at it. But after a few minutes of James literally(?) thinking "Lalalalalalalalala!" in his mind, the god had put on an annoyed expression and told James that she KNEW James was ignoring anything not related to his brother.

Apparently the deity wasn't ALLOWED to speak of it directly. But they had gone on to warn James that there was a small chance, small enough that it was barely worth thinking of, that Joseph Choi could return some day.

He'd be fighting against the will and soul of the Cleanser as they traveled through the cosmos. And there was no knowing how long that would last. But regardless of who won the fight, some day the entity would be back.

Only then would James know the fate of his little brother's soul. And regardless of the outcome, his brother would never be the same person as before.

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"Bring me-" He said before taking a long, ragged, breath. "bring me Joey. He's fine." Another breath. "He's fine. It was just..." Breath. "It was just a nightmare."

A small hand tapped at James's shoulder, as the chair they were in was wheeled up next to his bed on the same side Vickers was on.

James's head turned over to look at who it was, and his breathing froze for a moment as his eyes went wide in surprise.

Then they panned up and saw the antlers, and fear formed in them.

KRAK!

James looked back down at Veliry in shock as she slowly drew the hand back across the bed and into her lap. The movement visibly taxed her as she breathed slowly and heavily. Amina reached down to try and help her straighten, but the small mage shook her head slightly, then slowly placed the hand on the arm of her chair and sat up straight on her own. Even that small bit of activity seemed to drain her.

"Veliry?" He asked, more surprised than hurt. "Why'd you slap me?"

She took several long and deep breaths as she gathered her strength. Then she spoke slowly.

"Because.... you're being.... selfish." She said.

"What?" He asked in confusion. His eyes remained locked on the antlers sprouting from her head. They were no longer the massive jumble of branching madness that they had been in his nightmares, but they were still long and multi-pointed.

"Your brother." She said. Then her eyes sank. "Joseph.... didn't do what he did... so you could wallow in bed crying." She took a deep breath. "He didn't do it for me.... He didn't do it for Amina.... And believe it or not... He didn't even do it for YOU." She weakly pointed a finger at him and he cringed back. "He did it... because... and you know this..... he was a good person." She looked away for a moment and wiped tears from her cheek. "He did it because he was a helper.... He wanted to keep the people around him from being hurt.... or killed. But he would have done it for everyone else too. And this was the best way for him to do that."

"Nooo." James said. "No. There were other ways. There had to be another way." His eyes welled with more tears. "No. He should still be here."

Veliry looked back at Amina, who moved forward to see if she needed help. Instead Veliry simply placed a hand over Amina's.

"Could the rest of you give us a few minutes?" She asked. "I have to tell James a couple things. And.... I don't know who else would be allowed to hear it."

Vickers and Amina exchanged a glance even as the priestess was already moving toward the door.

"You sure?" Amina asked.

Veliry nodded and then seemed to relax a bit as she steadied her breathing.

"It's just.... It's stuff that he and I are.... uniquely allowed to know." She said. Then she seemed to reconsider. "At least I think he is."

Amina nodded to Vickers and the two of them left the James and Veliry alone.

James struggled against the restraints the whole time. His breathing never settled.

"James." Veliry said. But he didn't look at her, instead opting to continue his futile writhing. "James..... JAMES!" She yelled.

"Nooooo." He whined. "No you're wrong."

"James you were there." She said as she weakly tossed one of the I.V. bags at his face. It fell short and he looked at it with mild confusion. "You know that we were talking to Gods."

THAT got a change from James.

His eyebrows furrowed and his hands began flexing into fists. His breath began hissing out of his nose and his jaw clenched.

"Gods." He half growled through his teeth.

"Yes.... gods." She said sternly. "I remember you... intruding... I still don't know how you did that." She thought about it for a minute. "But I remember it. So you KNOW.... that we were told what had to happen."

"They did this." He hissed as he renewed his struggle for freedom. "I'll fucking kill them!"

"No any time soon you won't." Said a new voice.

James and Veliry froze in their positions, Veliry in the middle of reaching for James, and James with his neck arched up and his veins bulging as he strained against the leather straps.

"Some day though.... Maybe." Said a young, dark skinned woman, in a white 50's style dress, and a pair of rectangular glasses, as she sat down on the edge of the bed between the two of them. She took Veliry's hand and kissed it before moving it back to the mage's lap gently.

"Defiance." James said without any of his body actually moving. With his mind. And even using only his mind to speak, the word was filled with venom.

"The god from before?" Veliry asked in the same fashion.

"Yes. Though don't say that too loud." The woman said with a mischievous grin. "I'm.... SUPPOSED... to be on time out right now. Didn't take." Then she muttered. "Those fools really don't understand me."

"Let me move you bastard!" James yelled. "Let me move so I can fucking strangle you."

Defiance looked at James over the glasses. Then she pressed her hand to James's forehead and pressed him back down to the bed.

"You need to be quiet for a minute my dear." She said. "You aren't listening to the young woman when she's trying to tell you the truth. Part of which was that IIIII got in a bit of trouble with my coworkers to help you three."

"Us three?" James asked. "There's only two of us thanks to you you son of a bitch."

Defiance sighed and rolled her eyes, then ran a finger over James's mouth. James went silent immediately.

"Firstly. I was helping all three of you even then." She said.

Then she turned James's head to look over at Veliry. Stood up. Walked over behind Veliry and placed a hand over Veliry's stomach.

"Besides. There's still three people in this room. And no, I'm not counting myself." She said.

If James had had control of his body, his eyes would have been the size of dinner plates.

"Veliry?" He asked.

"I was trying to get there." She said awkwardly. "You weren't listening."

"Yes yes." Defiance interrupted. "I like stealing people's thunder. Now if you don't mind. I'm only able to be here because none of the others are in this realm at the moment. So we need to hurry." She sat back down between them again. "Lady mage, you are no longer needed for this conversation. Please and thank you." She said as she waved a hand at Veliry.

"Wait I-" She said before suddenly silencing.

Then Defiance turned back to James.

"She'd make a solid champion some day." She said with a smile. "Now. Let me tell you what actually happened." She leaned forward and booped James on his nose. "Because right now. Like this. You're no use to anyone. Least of all me. And definitely not any of your friends or family. Because Denial and Defiance ARE NOT the same thing young James."

And as James was held captive, the God told him the truth.

It didn't make James feel any better.

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Then they panned up and saw the antlers, and fear formed in them.

KRAK!

James looked back down at Veliry in shock as she slowly drew the hand back across the bed and into her lap. The movement visibly taxed her as she breathed slowly and heavily. Amina reached down to try and help her straighten, but the small mage shook her head slightly, then slowly placed the hand on the arm of her chair and sat up straight on her own. Even that small bit of activity seemed to drain her.

"Veliry?" He asked, more surprised than hurt. "Why'd you slap me?"

She took several long and deep breaths as she gathered her strength. Then she spoke slowly.

"Because.... you're being.... selfish." She said.

"What?" He asked in confusion. His eyes remained locked on the antlers sprouting from her head. They were no longer the massive jumble of branching madness that they had been in his nightmares, but they were still long and multi-pointed.

"Your brother." She said. Then her eyes sank. "Joseph.... didn't do what he did... so you could wallow in bed crying." She took a deep breath. "He didn't do it for me.... He didn't do it for Amina.... And believe it or not... He didn't even do it for YOU." She weakly pointed a finger at him and he cringed back. "He did it... because... and you know this..... he was a good person." She looked away for a moment and wiped tears from her cheek. "He did it because he was a helper.... He wanted to keep the people around him from being hurt.... or killed. But he would have done it for everyone else too. And this was the best way for him to do that."

"Nooo." James said. "No. There were other ways. There had to be another way." His eyes welled with more tears. "No. He should still be here."

Veliry looked back at Amina, who moved forward to see if she needed help. Instead Veliry simply placed a hand over Amina's.

"Could the rest of you give us a few minutes?" She asked. "I have to tell James a couple things. And.... I don't know who else would be allowed to hear it."

Vickers and Amina exchanged a glance even as the priestess was already moving toward the door.

"You sure?" Amina asked.

Veliry nodded and then seemed to relax a bit as she steadied her breathing.

"It's just.... It's stuff that he and I are.... uniquely allowed to know." She said. Then she seemed to reconsider. "At least I think he is."

Amina nodded to Vickers and the two of them left James and Veliry alone.

James struggled against the restraints the whole time. His breathing never settled.

"James." Veliry said. But he didn't look at her, instead opting to continue his futile writhing. "James..... JAMES!" She yelled.

"Nooooo." He whined. "No you're wrong."

"James you were there." She said as she weakly tossed one of the I.V. bags at his face. It fell short and he looked at it with mild confusion. "You know that we were talking to Gods."

THAT got a change from James.

His eyebrows furrowed and his hands began flexing into fists. His breath began hissing out of his nose and his jaw clenched.

"Gods." He half growled through his teeth.

"Yes.... gods." She said sternly. "I remember you... intruding... I still don't know how you did that." She thought about it for a minute. "But I remember it. So you KNOW.... that we were told what had to happen."

"They did this." He hissed as he renewed his struggle for freedom. "I'll fucking kill them!"

"Not any time soon you won't." Said a new voice.

James and Veliry froze in their positions, Veliry in the middle of reaching for James, and James with his neck arched up and his veins bulging as he strained against the leather straps.

"Some day though.... Maybe." Said a young, dark skinned woman, in a white 50's style dress, and a pair of rectangular glasses, as she sat down on the edge of the bed between the two of them. She took Veliry's hand and kissed it before moving it back to the mage's lap gently.

"Defiance." James said without any of his body actually moving. With his mind. And even using only his mind to speak, the word was filled with venom.

"The god from before?" Veliry asked in the same fashion.

"Yes. Though don't say that too loud." The woman said with a mischievous grin. "I'm.... SUPPOSED... to be on time out right now. Didn't take." Then she muttered. "Those fools really don't understand me."

"Let me move you bastard!" James yelled. "Let me move so I can fucking strangle you."

Defiance looked at James over the glasses. Then she pressed her hand to James's forehead and pressed him back down to the bed.

"You need to be quiet for a minute my dear." She said. "You aren't listening to the young woman when she's trying to tell you the truth. Part of which was that IIIII got in a bit of trouble with my coworkers to help you three."

"Us three?" James asked. "There's only two of us thanks to you you son of a bitch."

Defiance sighed and rolled her eyes, then ran a finger over James's mouth. James went silent immediately.

"Firstly. I was helping all three of you even then." She said.

Then she turned James's head to look over at Veliry. Stood up. Walked over behind Veliry and placed a hand over Veliry's stomach.

"Besides. There's still three people in this room. And no, I'm not counting myself." She said.

If James had had control of his body, his eyes would have been the size of dinner plates.

"Veliry?" He asked.

"I was trying to get there." She said awkwardly. "You weren't listening."

"Yes yes." Defiance interrupted. "I like stealing people's thunder. Now if you don't mind. I'm only able to be here because none of the others are in this realm at the moment. So we need to hurry." She sat back down between them again. "Lady mage, you are no longer needed for this conversation. Please and thank you." She said as she waved a hand at Veliry.

"Wait I-" She said before suddenly silencing.

Then Defiance turned back to James.

"She'd make a solid champion some day." She said with a smile. "Now. Let me tell you what actually happened." She leaned forward and booped James on his nose. "Because right now. Like this. You're no use to anyone. Least of all me. And definitely not any of your friends or family. Because Denial and Defiance ARE NOT the same thing young James."

And as James was held captive, the God told him the truth.

It didn't make James feel any better.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/111ltu8/wait_is_this_just_gate_313/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (311/?)

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"No. Not really." He admitted. He stood up and paced a bit as he replayed everything in his mind.

The Colonel simply waited.

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She listened silently, nodding a bit as he spoke.

"It's hard to see innocent people hurt." She said after a moment. "Even more so when they get hurt trying to help."

He nodded.

"Yeah." He said simply.

There was a knock at the door, and Vickers turned to see the princess poking her head through.

"Evening princess." He said. "Any change?"

Amina shook her head. "If anything I think I may need your help chief Vickers." She replied.

Vickers nodded.

"Keep us updated Chief. Do what you can." The Colonel said. "We'll let you know if we learn anything from the drones. And we can talk about your... transformation.... at a more opportune time."

"Yes ma'am." He said as her feed cut out. Then he turned back to the princess. "How can I help?" He asked.

Amina filled him in.

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King Farrick looked at all the scrolls and notes that had been laid out in front of him.

He looked at the people arrayed before him. Mages, soldiers, members of the druid confluence, some of the castle healers.

And he felt tired.

"So we have reason to believe." Arch Mage Marcos droned on in his slow, old man droll. "That the blight hasn't actually been.... er.... destroyed... as it were." Farrick sighed as he listened. "But rather that they have been um... it has been.... removed." He muttered something to himself about terminology before continuing. "That it has.... entered the cosmos... your majesty." He said with a gesture toward the ceiling.

He turned and addressed the other people present. "Do those of you who were there concur?" He asked.

The druids and several of the mages began to nod their heads.

"And it took the Conduit with it." One of the druids chimed in. "Or at least most of it. One of the Five has re-manifested."

The king took that in. The energies, the world altering POWERS, that had collided had been monumental in their importance and impact on the world. And both of them were effectively gone now.

"What kind of effects will that have on this world?" He asked.

An older member of the druids present, who seemed to be made of some kind of sand stone though none of it fell off as he moved, spoke up.

"In the short term not much." She said in a grating voice. "They have already begun to recover the plant life of the area and are reclaiming the matter from the er.... shield?... bag?... whatever you want to call it." The King wouldn't have called her tone cheerful, but it at least sounded positive. "However, Nek'Mar, as this one is named this time, is

only the herald of feasting and growth. They have little sway over much else, though they are doing what they can."

"So we can expect some... turbulence.... in the region's natural order?" King Farrick asked.

The elder druid nodded slowly, and haltingly.

"We have already requested the aid of Conduit members from other confluences across the world." Another druid weighed in. "They are dispatching what they can. Though obviously this will put their regions into some turmoil as well."

The King nodded understanding. "Let them know that we appreciate any aide they can lend, and send word to their parent Kingdoms that we will reimburse them to the best of our ability."

The druids, and one of his scribes near them, nodded acknowledgement.

Then he turned to the healers.

"What of the Chois." He asked grimly. "And what of the Arch Mage."

Healer Shrend Farstorm spoke up, his tone weary and concerned.

"Mrs. Choi is.... recovering." He said. "At the very least her body will not fail her on our watch sir." He added with some pride. "She is however grieving. As I'm sure we can all understand. The young Captain, I am told, is in much the same state. One of the mistresses of slumber attends to him in his chambers." He sighed. "As for the arch mage. The.... changes... she underwent. Well, they were severe, and incredibly intense. Her body was only able to survive it because of a powerful relic she had in her possession. One which used the last of its power to save her this time."

"Her ring?" The King mused.

Shrend nodded. "Indeed sir. She is... whole. Though she has also regained the antlers that her merge with the Conduit caused." He turned to the druids, many of whom had turned in surprise at that. "Though, the powers did not return with it." He paused and looked uneasy for a moment. "In fact... none of her powers did."

Marcos spat out a bit of the tea he had been in the middle of slowly sipping next to the King.

"Her powers?" King Farrick asked curiously. "What do you mean?"

Shrend looked at the healers next to him, one of them, an older elf woman, nodded.

"She." He began. "It appears that she has no magical energy within her body now." He said. "There's a little in there. About the bare minimum

that a native of this world would need to survive, I imagine. But little more than that."

"She lost her powers?" Marcos asked in surprise. He stood up as the healer nodded, and began slowly making his way toward the door, muttering about impossibilities and other things. King Farrick watched him leave.

"There's more." Shrend said as the door shut behind the old mage. He looked at the other healer again and nodded at her.

She stood up suddenly and began barking orders.

"Up!" She demanded. "Everybody up and out." She said, her tone commanding and surprising most of the other people seated into following the orders. The few who didn't were quickly shooed out of their seats by the woman and a few of the other healers present.

Once everyone had left save the King and the large Minotaur healer, Shrend spoke up again.

"She had.... a lot of energy forced through her body." He said uncertainly. "A lot of LIFE... energy. Energy of the Mother of the Forests." He continued. "Then she also had to use a relic that flooded her body with regenerative energies too."

The King listened to him intently, wondering where he was going with this.

"And." Shrend continued after a moment. "The night before. After the party."

And suddenly the king understood.

"She was with the young Joseph Choi." He said, finishing the thought for the healer.

Shrend nodded.

"It's far too early to tell." He admitted. "But in the few instances when she was conscious she mentioned learning of it while she was empowered. She at least is certain of it.

King Farrick had sat forward as the information had coalesced in his mind. Now he ran his hands over his face and through his hair in frustration and weariness.

"Let none know save those who must." He said after some moments of thought. "Least of all the Chois. Not yet. They need time to come back." He paused. "Once they're strong enough again. Strong enough to handle it. Until then you must keep it from spreading."

Shrend considered this. Then nodded.

"Aye sir." He said.

King Farrick gestured for him to leave.

"I." He began. "I need some time to think of everything I have learned." He said simply, and he watched the Minotaur nod understanding before turning to leave.

He sat there for who knew how long, simply sifting through everything.

When had being a king ever been this difficult? He wondered. Surely not since his wife had passed. And oh how he longed for her guidance here.

He stood, finally, and gathered the papers from in front of him.

"First step." He said to himself as he stood up fully. "Help your daughter."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10z3ksy/wait_is_this_just_gate_312/)

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He looked at the people arrayed before him. Mages, soldiers, members of the druid confluence, some of the castle healers.

And he felt tired.

"So we have reason to believe." Arch Mage Marcos droned on in his slow, old man droll. "That the blight hasn't actually been.... er.... destroyed... as it were." Farrick sighed as he listened. "But rather that they have been um... it has been.... removed." He muttered something to

himself about terminology before continuing. "That it has.... entered the cosmos... your majesty." He said with a gesture toward the ceiling.

He turned and addressed the other people present. "Do those of you who were there concur?" He asked.

The druids and several of the mages began to nod their heads.

"And it took the Conduit with it." One of the druids chimed in. "Or at least most of it. One of the Five has re-manifested."

The king took that in. The energies, the world altering POWERS, that had collided had been monumental in their importance and impact on the world. And both of them were effectively gone now.

"What kind of effects will that have on this world?" He asked.

An older member of the druids present, who seemed to be made of some kind of sand stone though none of it fell off as he moved, spoke up.

"In the short term not much." She said in a grating voice. "They have already begun to recover the plant life of the area and are reclaiming the matter from the er.... shield?... bag?... whatever you want to call it." The King wouldn't have called her tone cheerful, but it at least sounded positive. "However, Nek'Mar, as this one is named this time, is only the herald of feasting and growth. They have little sway over much else, though they are doing what they can."

"So we can expect some... turbulence.... in the region's natural order?" King Farrick asked.

The elder druid nodded slowly, and haltingly.

"We have already requested the aid of Conduit members from other confluences across the world." Another druid weighed in. "They are dispatching what they can. Though obviously this will put their regions into some turmoil as well."

The King nodded understanding. "Let them know that we appreciate any aide they can lend, and send word to their parent Kingdoms that we will reimburse them to the best of our ability."

The druids, and one of his scribes near them, nodded acknowledgement.

Then he turned to the healers.

"What of the Chois." He asked grimly. "And what of the Arch Mage."

Healer Shrend Farstorm spoke up, his tone weary and concerned.

"Mrs. Choi is.... recovering." He said. "At the very least her body will not fail her on our watch sir." He added with some pride. "She is however grieving. As I'm sure we can all understand. The young Captain, I am told, is in much the same state. One of the mistresses of slumber attends

to him in his chambers." He sighed. "As for the arch mage. The.... changes... she underwent. Well, they were severe, and incredibly intense. Her body was only able to survive it because of a powerful relic she had in her possession. One which used the last of its power to save her this time."

"Her ring?" The King mused.

Shrend nodded. "Indeed sir. She is... whole. Though she has also regained the antlers that her merge with the Conduit caused." He turned to the druids, many of whom had turned in surprise at that. "Though, the powers did not return with it." He paused and looked uneasy for a moment. "In fact... none of her powers did."

Marcos spat out a bit of the tea he had been in the middle of slowly sipping next to the King.

"Her powers?" King Farrick asked curiously. "What do you mean?"

Shrend looked at the healers next to him, one of them, an older elf woman, nodded.

"She." He began. "It appears that she has no magical energy within her body now." He said. "There's a little in there. About the bare minimum that a native of this world would need to survive, I imagine. But little more than that."

"She lost her powers?" Marcos asked in surprise. He stood up as the healer nodded, and began slowly making his way toward the door, muttering about impossibilities and other things. King Farrick watched him leave.

"There's more." Shrend said as the door shut behind the old mage. He looked at the other healer again and nodded at her.

She stood up suddenly and began barking orders.

"Up!" She demanded. "Everybody up and out." She said, her tone commanding and surprising most of the other people seated into following the orders. The few who didn't were quickly shooed out of their seats by the woman and a few of the other healers present.

Once everyone had left save the King and the large Minotaur healer, Shrend spoke up again.

"She had.... a lot of energy forced through her body." He said uncertainly. "A lot of LIFE... energy. Energy of the Mother of the Forests." He continued. "Then she also had to use a relic that flooded her body with regenerative energies too."

The King listened to him intently, wondering where he was going with this.

"And." Shrend continued after a moment. "The night before. After the party."

And suddenly the king understood.

"She was with the young Joseph Choi." He said, finishing the thought for the healer.

Shrend nodded.

"It's far too early to tell." He admitted. "But in the few instances when she was conscious she mentioned learning of it while she was empowered. She at least is certain of it.

King Farrick had sat forward as the information had coalesced in his mind. Now he ran his hands over his face and through his hair in frustration and weariness.

"Let none know save those who must." He said after some moments of thought. "Least of all the Chois. Not yet. They need time to come back." He paused. "Once they're strong enough again. Strong enough to handle it. Until then you must keep it from spreading."

Shrend considered this. Then nodded.

"Aye sir." He said.

King Farrick gestured for him to leave.

"I." He began. "I need some time to think of everything I have learned." He said simply, and he watched the Minotaur nod understanding before turning to leave.

He sat there for who knew how long, simply sifting through everything.

When had being a king ever been this difficult? He wondered. Surely not since his wife had passed. And oh how he longed for her guidance here.

He stood, finally, and gathered the papers from in front of him.

"First step." He said to himself as he stood up fully. "Help your daughter."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10z3jeo/wait_is_this_just_gate_312/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (310/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10wdxhc/wait_is_this_just_gate_309/)

Writer's note: I've uh.... I got nothing for you today readers.... I'm sorry.

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James sat on the ground on his knees as the tears rolled down his cheeks in a torrent. His eyes panned around slowly without actually seeing any of the area around him. He screamed into the air loud, and long enough that his voice became ragged as it wound down. And as he did the memories of the few minutes that had just passed replayed in his mind like a nightmare.

>He remembered scrambling to his feet after the blast of power from Veliry's fall, and seeing his brother flying into the sky like a missile.

Bits of the now defunct plant dome/bag crashed around him as his hands dug into the thing he was holding onto.

>He remembered crying out "JOEY!" as he ran and jumped off of the massive mushroom platform and blasting into the sky after him. He hadn't spared a glance for Veliry as she lay on the ground, plant life and animal flesh sloughing off of her as she reached into one of the pockets on her robes. Nor did he so much as consider anything that had been in his "backblast" as he took off, all of which was now smoldering and destroyed.He remembered screaming for his brother to stop, and wondering at the small splatterings of blood that fell and landed on him as he flew, struggling to catch up to his rapidly accelerating sibling.

He stood up on legs covered in black veins and stumbled as he felt them turn to jelly beneath him. But he had to get back. Had to get home. Had to get help.

>He remembered feeling that NATURE energy from before flood back into the area ahead of him. Saw the green light that began emitting from his brother as he pushed himself to fly faster. And remembered something feeling his arm go numb as something he couldn't see flew past him, and faster than him, on an intercept course with his brother's new form. A form that now had a pair of antlers fused with its head.

He stumbled and fell as he tripped on something, a root or stone maybe, and he scrambled to keep a hold of the thing in his arms. He took a moment to sob into it, wailing and screaming as he did. A pair of strong, clawed, hands tried to lift him up and he shrugged away from them. They couldn't have him. Nobody could.

>He remembered the soft, yet resonating words of his brother as he finally began to close the distance on him."James." Joey had said. "Stop. Go back."Something had collided with him, something soft, and he felt his stomach go queasy as his flight faltered for a moment. Then it was past him, and merging with the tendrils that were flowing behind Joey."NO!" He'd cried out. "YOU GO BACK! DON'T DO THIS! COME BACK!"Joey had looked at him with sorrow in his eyes. "I can't." He'd said.And yet he'd slowed down. Not much, maybe just a few miles per hour, but it was enough that James had been able to catch all the way up with one last, massive, blast of energy.He'd clamped his hands onto his little brother's shoulders, a little too hard as his wolf claws dug in a bit, and he'd pulled Joey into a hug. His arms went numb as they went into the ethereal, not really there, tendrils.But he'd clamped onto his

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The hands hauled James to his feet. Somewhere, some long distance away, Vickers offered to help him. To help carry what his burden. James ignored him and shambled on. Towards the door, and the castle beyond it. Towards real help.

Towards their mother. She would know what to do. She'd always taken care of them. She could fix this.

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James came around the bend in the small path, and past the thicket of forest he saw the door leading back to the castle. He also saw Atrafar, and the handful of soldiers, mages, and druids who had been awaiting news of what had happened. He saw his new wife, whose hands went to her mouth as she saw him and what he carried and broke out in tears.

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Not right now.

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"Lady Choi. I'm afraid there's been a development." He'd said, his tone chilling her. "Would you please follow me?"

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"Momma?" A quavering voice that she knew and loved, and had never heard sound like that before, asked and her blood ran cold at the sound of it.

The whole room turned around and beheld her son James as he stepped through the door with his little brother's lifeless form in his arms.

"James?" She asked as her mind struggled to understand. "Joseph?" She said as her hand reached up and clutched at her chest and her heart skipped.

"Momma... help." James pleaded as he fell to his knees.

The room seemed to spin, and her legs went out from under her as a series of hands reached out to catch her.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10y6s3i/wait_is_this_just_gate_311/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (310/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10wd22z/wait_is_this_just_gate_309/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10y6pya/wait_is_this_just_gate_311/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (309?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10vf0gj/wait_is_this_just_gate_308/)

Ignore the previous title screw up.

Writer's note: Well. Even I didn't know that was coming.

Shit.

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For the first time in this world's entire history, three separate Gods stepped foot onto it simultaneously and in the same general area. Two of them, the oldest and fairest of them all, though also the coldest and least forgiving, paid visit to two separate mortal beings who had taken into themselves entities of those god's purest forms.

The third simply trailed along after the other two. And as time imperceptibly halted for everyone except them and the two mortals they entreated with, the third god made counter offers that the first two gods already expected AND accepted.

Then, as they departed, time resumed.

And the two mortals, who were no longer TRULY mortal, began a metamorphosis.

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James landed on the ground in a slide and turned to look up at the clash above him.

The ground shook as the supporting plant structures swelled with mass and helped press the massive, pink-glowing, form of the druidic bottomless bag against the tentacles of the blight entity.

He watched as one of the tentacles swooped around the side of the bag and attempted to break it like it had with the previous one that he'd helped make. Then he watched as the bag deformed around the damaged area and began encompassing the attacking tentacle, enclosing it like a white blood cell attacking a virus.

Vickers landed next to him, Tom scrambling to a stop as he did.

"Is it working?" He asked, his rifle still aimed skyward as Tom wheeled around.

"I think so." James replied.

Above them the bag pushed back a bit as the entity's massive, multi-limbed form, surged forward. A loud cry of anger rose from the west, toward the massive tree as the ground beneath them trembled like an earthquake.

Prince Alixan flew overhead in a flurry of black feathered wings.

"HELP the arch ^(mage!)" He yelled as he flew into the distance.

Vickers kicked Tom into motion with a confused look on his face as James ran and leapt into the air, blasting off.

The two monstrous constructs above them writhed and deformed as they wrestled against each other.

\---------------------------

Joey stood up on uneasy legs, and was surprised to find that he was only wearing his boxers and socks that he'd brought over from Earth. His robes were gone.

He pushed off of what his senses told him was the ground, though his eyes saw nothing except a wide expanse of dark grey nothingness. It had no features, and as his hand pushed off the ground below it seemed to ripple, as if made of some kind of slow moving liquid, maybe oobleck.

As he stood he noticed a set of rabidly hungry eyes that glared at him from within a many-limbed form that seemed to shift and morph as he looked at it. And, almost instantly, he recognized it for what it was. He knew it in his very soul.

It was the blight entity in a sentient and conscious form. It was the one that the original Blight Possessed had warned the Agency about in Vickers' footage.

The Cleanser.

It stared at him as he stood up, and Joey got the sense that it would have circled him like a hungry animal if it had been allowed to.

Joey slowly backed up, keeping his eyes locked on it as he did.

Then he bumped into something.

His skin crawled as every sense in his mind screamed at him for the mistake.

Joey spun around rapidly, eager to get eyes on the new threat and then back on the Cleanser.

And he saw a rather plain looking man.

The sight made him do a double take. He tried to activate his visual magic to help him process but nothing happened.

Joey, thrown off, looked at the man and was immediately reminded of Milton from the old movie Office Space. The man was taller. And his clothes were a touch more refined. But he had the glasses, and the pens in his pocket, and the look of someone who had spent their entire life analyzing data on spread sheets and balancing finance accounts.

And he was smiling at Joey in a way that was eerily serene.

"Um..... Hi?" Joey said uncertainly.

"Hello Joseph Choi." The man said in a voice that was deeper and softer than a swimming pool full of cotton balls.

"Who are you?" Joey asked as he quickly peered back at the Cleanser, glad to see that it hadn't moved. "What is this place?"

As he asked the question he looked up and was temporarily dumbfounded at the sight of countless galaxies, sitting above him and seemingly close enough to touch.

"What's happening?" He added.

"You accidentally touched me just now." The man said, still just as softly. "Both in the real world, and here." He continued. "And your... body.... has already told you what has happened both times. And as such, who I am. What I am."

Joey thought back to how he'd bumped into the man just moments ago.

Every instinct and reflex in his body had screamed at him that he was in danger.

The man nodded.

"I'm dead?" He asked. And as he said it, the truth of it rang like a bell in his mind. "And you're.... death?"

The man's soft smile faltered a bit.

"I'm sorry." He said.

"You're one of the so-called gods that James met." Joey said. "Like the moon. And that Defiance guy."

"He and I are well acquainted, though we haven't met just yet." The man said. "Soon enough though. In the grand scheme of things."

Joey let the words sink in.

He'd died.

But he was doing so well. He'd been making strides towards having a life of his own. One where he felt like he was in control and able to function. He couldn't die yet.

The man smiled and nodded, seeming to understand the thoughts running through Joeys head even as they did so.

Questions raced through his mind right beside them.

"Why am I here?" He asked, sensing that it was the RIGHT question. "This place here and now." He said as he gestured at the area around them,

then at the Cleanser. "With that thing? Why am I here." Tears streaked down his cheeks. "Why? Does everyone get this treatment?"

Death shook its head slightly.

"No." It admitted. "You are in a precarious situation. You see. You have been taken by..." It glanced over at the Cleanser for a moment. "My least favorite creation. But it happened almost simultaneously as that part of it entering the trap."

Joey lowered himself to the ground as he started wiping at the tears.

He'd planned on asking Miss Veliry out on a proper date when they got back. So they could talk and figure out what exactly they were now.

"And so, while you are consumed... cleansed as it would say." Death continued. "You are also.... how should I phrase this?... You're in a sort of limbo."

"And that's where I come in doc." The familiar voice of Bugs Bunny said as a hand rested on his shoulder.

Joey jumped at the sudden contact and looked over at the newly arrived entity as he scrambled away.

And he saw his brother.

"Relax Jojo." James said as Joey scrambled to his feet. "And sorry to preemptively burst your bubble but I'm not actually your brother."

"What?" He asked, freezing in his tracks.

"I'm not James." It repeated. And as it did Joey realized that its voice was deeper. And its arm wasn't covered in fur and ending in claws. Also it was wearing a standard army uniform, minus the helmet.

He backed away from it slowly.

"Who are you?" He asked as his hands pressed onto his ears. "What are you?"

The new entity put on a pained smile as its form shifted to that of one of his favorite teachers from middle school, Mr. Rastenberg.

"I go by Defiance." It said. "And I've got an offer for you."

Joey looked over at Death, who simply nodded.

"What is it?" He asked.

"Right now someone else's life hangs in the balance." Defiance said. "If I had it my way." He said in a conspiratorial tone. "I'd save both of you. But.... it's not that easy. And they will want to save you just as much as you want to save them."

There were only two people that were currently in life threatening situations that Joey knew of. And one of them should, theoretically, have been safe if everything else had gone right.

"Miss Veliry." He said, as the facts clicked into place.

Defiance nodded.

"One of you must live in order for events to reach the conclusion that has been laid out." Death said, just as softly as before. "Either one will work. For different reasons that will take things down different paths."

"But if both of you die." Defiance cut in. "The path goes a different way that neither of us-" He gestured at death and himself. "want."

Joey's hands pinched at his ears and pulled at his hair as they clamped down on his head. He needed James. He needed Miss Veliry.

He needed his mom and dad.

This couldn't be real.

Then Defiance's hand rested on his shoulder again. And Death's hand took the other.

"It's gonna be difficult kid." Defiance admitted. "This is gonna be the hardest thing any of you have to do for a long time. But it has to happen."

"One way or the other." Death said, and its voice was harder than before.

"What...." Joey began. "What do I have to do?"

And the Cleanser prowled a little bit closer to them.

\---------------

James landed near the cluster of druids at a run.

The group was smaller now. Or rather, it had less LIVING members. Many of them had transformed, violently, into various forms of plant and animal life.

Veliry still stood in the center of it, her arms now reaching out as if to grab at something and strangle it. Her goat-like eyes flaring with a dazzling array of colors as energy flowed out of her in waves that made James ache in a way that he couldn't put to words. The antlers sprouting from her head looked less like the growths of a woodland creature than they did the branches of a great tree like the one behind her. He skin resembled the lichen coated bark of that same tree, even as scales and fur pulsed between the pieces of it.

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He wasn't given a choice.

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He felt his knees buckle as he pressed his face into the prince's arm as if clinging onto it for his life.

And he became aware of everything within a hundred miles.

Including a conversation between Veliry and a god whose power was so far beyond either of the two that he'd met before.

^("Life.") He groaned out as his consciousness melted into those flowing through him. ^("Mother.... Goddess..... Veliry!") Then, as the conversation moved forward, rapid and all encompassing even in the briefest of moments that his mortal flesh would never perceive, he heard what it was about.

"JOEY!" He yelled in a burst as he realized why he hadn't seen his little brother yet. ^("NNNNNNNNooooooooo!")

And then he felt himself wash away with the current of the energies flowing through him as he became one more wire in that engine that he'd been reminded of.

But not before he felt himself explode with rage.

And instead of fighting the current of energy and souls and life. James turned into it, and rode it towards its destination.

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"Yes and no." He said. "There's a reason I like the guy.

>!"NO!"!< An angry voice said from nearby.

Veliry wiped some of the tears away as she looked around. She had the sense of a familiar presence.

>!"YOU CAN'T HAVE HIM!"!< The voice repeated, and Veliry felt the ground tremble as the grass pulsed, as if blown by a sudden breeze. >!"YOU CAN'T HAVE JOEY!"!<

There was a loud tearing noise, and part of the serene scenery nearby began to ripple.

A face pressed against the veil of the in-between space they were in, and Veliry stood up in surprise.

"James?" She asked in confusion.

A finger pointed at her through the membrane of whatever he was pressing against.

"VELIRY!" He yelled. "DON'T YOU LET THEM TAKE HIM! HE'S NOT THEIRS!"

She could feel the rage in the young man as she saw his hands begin pulling at the barrier between them. How could he possibly be here.

"This one." The Mother of the Land spoke. "Is.... tenacious..... And angry."

Defiance stepped up in front of its favorite mortal and James turned up to look him in the eyes.

"YOU CAN'T HAVE HIM!" James cried out. And Veliry could hear the strain, the fear, and the heart ache, in the claim. "HE'S MY BROTHER! I WON'T LET YOU TAKE HIM! I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU! I'LL KILL ALL OF YOU!"

Defiance reached up and placed a hand on the face that struggled so desperately to pierce the veil into a place it wasn't allowed. It rested its palm on James's forehead and whispered.

^("I know you would.") It said as it pushed James back. ^("Not today though.")

"You sonofabitch!" James hissed through gritted teeth as he was pressed back into the flow of energy again.

Veliry looked down at the grass. At her hands, which were human once more.

"I know what I have to do." She said as she sank back down to the grass.

"I am sorry child." Life said somberly, knowing what the decision was.

"Go to hell." She said as the two goddesses faded, along with the area around her.

Defiance stepped up next to her again.

She looked up at him with curiosity as tears continued to stream down her non-existant cheeks.

"And now I give you the same offer I gave little Jojo." He said as he eased down next to her. "By the way, James getting in here however briefly WAS me."

He looked over at her with a devilish grin.

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He fell off of the terrified creature and wasn't surprised to see his mount's loyalty fail in the wash of druidic magical energy and run from the area.

The SEAL fell to his hands and knees and clawed at the flesh of the massive mushroom, releasing a growl as if he was trying to intimidate the very thing that was scaring him. His claws dug in as he forced his own body into obedience and pushed through towards the Captain.

RUN! His mind yelled at itself. And every ounce of him wanted to listen to it.

"No." He growled through gritted teeth. "Gotta.... get him.... out."

And just as his clawed hand reached out for Choi's leg, the magic in the area dropped down to almost nothing and he lurched forward, latching onto the young captain's legs so unexpectedly that he felt blood well up around his claws for a moment before Choi fell backwards on top of him.

He rolled over, rolling Choi's limp body with him and for a moment he thought that the young man had died. Then he felt a heartbeat under his fingers as he touched his neck. It was beating with a machine-gun tempo.

Choi's eyes opened and scanned around rapidly.

He exploded up off the ground and onto his feet, swatting Vickers out of the way with a backhand that would have knocked a normal person out.

"WHERE IS HE!" He yelled with a rage that Vickers had never seen from him. "WHERE IS JO-"

He stilled suddenly as a glowing green hand touched to his forehead, and Vickers covered his eyes.

Veliry floated before James, wreathed in flowers and vines and glowing like a green sun. The antlers still sprouted from her head, but otherwise her body was all but human again.

There was a loud cracking noise that emanated from above them, so loud and long that for a moment Vickers thought it was lightning.

Choi looked up at her with tears pouring from his eyes.

"I have to save him." Vickers heard the young man say, sounding like he was begging. "Don't let them have him."

Vickers flinched as another crack emanated from the sky, and he looked up as light dawned on him and the others around them.

The massive construct above them was falling, no longer supported by the massive structures that the young mage had helped grow to support it. It no longer glowed pink. And Vickers' jaw dropped as he saw that a large portion of it was missing.

"I know." Veliry said in a voice that echoed, as if spoken from far away beyond a great chasm. "But only this time you can't. It is between he and I."

The druids, who had slowly regained their senses, fell or rolled over to their knees and began chanting. Prince Alixan simply stared at what was occurring, unable to understand what was happening even though he had also just shared a consciousness with them.

The sky darkened for a moment and they all turned to look at what had caused it.

Floating above them, surrounded by writhing masses of hard to look at tendrils that emerged from his back, and with eyes of the same unfathomable nothingness, was a young man's half naked form.

Vickers gasped as he saw who it was. And he heard Choi let out a cry of agony as he saw what had happened to his little brother.

And Veliry rose up to meet him.

"Hi." They both said simultaneously. Veliry's cheeks flared with slightly pinkish light even as Joey's hand reached up and slapped his forehead.

"You know?" Joey asked.

Veliry nodded.

Joey looked her in the eyes and smiled.

"The hard way then." He said as he rested his forehead against hers. "Goodbye Miss Veliry. I'm sorry.""

And before anyone could react, except maybe Veliry who chose not to, Joey reached up with both hands and tore the antlers from her head in a spray of gore.

The area erupted in a maelstrom of wind, magical energy, flying wildlife (though not all of them could fly), and a scream of pain that echoed throughout the land.

Veliry's unconscious form, covered in her own blood, and no longer glowing with magic, plummeted to the ground.

And Joey began to ascend like a bullet fired from a gun.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10x7elm/wait_is_this_just_gate_310/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (309/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10veyb5/wait_is_this_just_gate_308/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Well. Even I didn't know that was coming.

Shit.

\~

For the first time in this world's entire history, three separate Gods stepped foot onto it simultaneously and in the same general area. Two of them, the oldest and fairest of them all, though also the coldest and

least forgiving, paid visit to two separate mortal beings who had taken into themselves entities of those god's purest forms.

The third simply trailed along after the other two. And as time imperceptibly halted for everyone except them and the two mortals they entreated with, the third god made counter offers that the first two gods already expected AND accepted.

Then, as they departed, time resumed.

And the two mortals, who were no longer TRULY mortal, began a metamorphosis.

\----------

James landed on the ground in a slide and turned to look up at the clash above him.

The ground shook as the supporting plant structures swelled with mass and helped press the massive, pink-glowing, form of the druidic bottomless bag against the tentacles of the blight entity.

He watched as one of the tentacles swooped around the side of the bag and attempted to break it like it had with the previous one that he'd helped make. Then he watched as the bag deformed around the damaged area and began encompassing the attacking tentacle, enclosing it like a white blood cell attacking a virus.

Vickers landed next to him, Tom scrambling to a stop as he did.

"Is it working?" He asked, his rifle still aimed skyward as Tom wheeled around.

"I think so." James replied.

Above them the bag pushed back a bit as the entity's massive, multi-limbed form, surged forward. A loud cry of anger rose from the west, toward the massive tree as the ground beneath them trembled like an earthquake.

Prince Alixan flew overhead in a flurry of black feathered wings.

"HELP the arch ^(mage!") He yelled as he flew into the distance.

Vickers kicked Tom into motion with a confused look on his face as James ran and leapt into the air, blasting off.

The two monstrous constructs above them writhed and deformed as they wrestled against each other.

\----------

Joey stood up on uneasy legs, and was surprised to find that he was only wearing his boxers and socks that he'd brought over from Earth. His robes were gone.

He pushed off of what his senses told him was the ground, though his eyes saw nothing except a wide expanse of dark grey nothingness. It had no features, and as his hand pushed off the ground below it seemed to ripple, as if made of some kind of slow moving liquid, maybe oobleck.

As he stood he noticed a set of rabidly hungry eyes that glared at him from within a many-limbed form that seemed to shift and morph as he looked at it. And, almost instantly, he recognized it for what it was. He knew it in his very soul.

It was the blight entity in a sentient and conscious form. It was the one that the original Blight Possessed had warned the Agency about in Vickers' footage.

The Cleanser.

It stared at him as he stood up, and Joey got the sense that it would have circled him like a hungry animal if it had been allowed to.

Joey slowly backed up, keeping his eyes locked on it as he did.

Then he bumped into something.

His skin crawled as every sense in his mind screamed at him for the mistake.

Joey spun around rapidly, eager to get eyes on the new threat and then back on the Cleanser.

And he saw a rather plain looking man.

The sight made him do a double take. He tried to activate his visual magic to help him process but nothing happened.

Joey, thrown off, looked at the man and was immediately reminded of Milton from the old movie Office Space. The man was taller. And his clothes were a touch more refined. But he had the glasses, and the pens in his pocket, and the look of someone who had spent their entire life analyzing data on spread sheets and balancing finance accounts.

And he was smiling at Joey in a way that was eerily serene.

"Um..... Hi?" Joey said uncertainly.

"Hello Joseph Choi." The man said in a voice that was deeper and softer than a swimming pool full of cotton balls.

"Who are you?" Joey asked as he quickly peered back at the Cleanser, glad to see that it hadn't moved. "What is this place?"

As he asked the question he looked up and was temporarily dumbfounded at the sight of countless galaxies, sitting above him and seemingly close enough to touch.

"What's happening?" He added.

"You accidentally touched me just now." The man said, still just as softly. "Both in the real world, and here." He continued. "And your... body.... has already told you what has happened both times. And as such, who I am. What I am."

Joey thought back to how he'd bumped into the man just moments ago.

Every instinct and reflex in his body had screamed at him that he was in danger.

The man nodded.

"I'm dead?" He asked. And as he said it, the truth of it rang like a bell in his mind. "And you're.... death?"

The man's soft smile faltered a bit.

"I'm sorry." He said.

"You're one of the so-called gods that James met." Joey said. "Like the moon. And that Defiance guy."

"He and I are well acquainted, though we haven't met just yet." The man said. "Soon enough though. In the grand scheme of things."

Joey let the words sink in.

He'd died.

But he was doing so well. He'd been making strides towards having a life of his own. One where he felt like he was in control and able to function. He couldn't die yet.

The man smiled and nodded, seeming to understand the thoughts running through Joeys head even as they did so.

Questions raced through his mind right beside them.

"Why am I here?" He asked, sensing that it was the RIGHT question. "This place here and now." He said as he gestured at the area around them, then at the Cleanser. "With that thing? Why am I here." Tears streaked down his cheeks. "Why? Does everyone get this treatment?"

Death shook its head slightly.

"No." It admitted. "You are in a precarious situation. You see. You have been taken by..." It glanced over at the Cleanser for a moment. "My least

favorite creation. But it happened almost simultaneously as that part of it entering the trap."

Joey lowered himself to the ground as he started wiping at the tears.

He'd planned on asking Miss Veliry out on a proper date when they got back. So they could talk and figure out what exactly they were now.

"And so, while you are consumed... cleansed as it would say." Death continued. "You are also.... how should I phrase this?... You're in a sort of limbo."

"And that's where I come in doc." The familiar voice of Bugs Bunny said as a hand rested on his shoulder.

Joey jumped at the sudden contact and looked over at the newly arrived entity as he scrambled away.

And he saw his brother.

"Relax Jojo." James said as Joey scrambled to his feet. "And sorry to preemptively burst your bubble but I'm not actually your brother."

"What?" He asked, freezing in his tracks.

"I'm not James." It repeated. And as it did Joey realized that its voice was deeper. And its arm wasn't covered in fur and ending in claws. Also it was wearing a standard army uniform, minus the helmet.

He backed away from it slowly.

"Who are you?" He asked as his hands pressed onto his ears. "What are you?"

The new entity put on a pained smile as its form shifted to that of one of his favorite teachers from middle school, Mr. Rastenberg.

"I go by Defiance." It said. "And I've got an offer for you."

Joey looked over at Death, who simply nodded.

"What is it?" He asked.

"Right now someone else's life hangs in the balance." Defiance said. "If I had it my way." He said in a conspiratorial tone. "I'd save both of you. But.... it's not that easy. And they will want to save you just as much as you want to save them."

There were only two people that were currently in life threatening situations that Joey knew of. And one of them should, theoretically, have been safe if everything else had gone right.

"Miss Veliry." He said, as the facts clicked into place.

Defiance nodded.

"One of you must live in order for events to reach the conclusion that has been laid out." Death said, just as softly as before. "Either one will work. For different reasons that will take things down different paths."

"But if both of you die." Defiance cut in. "The path goes a different way that neither of us-" He gestured at death and himself. "want."

Joey's hands pinched at his ears and pulled at his hair as they clamped down on his head. He needed James. He needed Miss Veliry.

He needed his mom and dad.

This couldn't be real.

Then Defiance's hand rested on his shoulder again. And Death's hand took the other.

"It's gonna be difficult kid." Defiance admitted. "This is gonna be the hardest thing any of you have to do for a long time. But it has to happen."

"One way or the other." Death said, and its voice was harder than before.

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And the Cleanser prowled a little bit closer to them.

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And Veliry rose up to meet him.

"Hi." They both said simultaneously. Veliry's cheeks flared with slightly pinkish light even as Joey's hand reached up and slapped his forehead.

"You know?" Joey asked.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (308/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10sxqpg/wait_is_this_just_gate_307/)

Writer's note: Whooo boy!..... That is one STEEP ass cliff! Helluva fall if you don't hold onto that one.

>!Remember that I don't know where the story is going until I write it!<.

Anyways, I'll see y'all tomorrow.

Enjoy!

\~

"SO!" James yelled as he and his brother flew through the air in their vastly different styles. "WHAT IS THE PLAN?"

Joey pointed over his shoulder and up into the sky. "THE DOME!"

James rolled over slowly as he flew and looked int he indicated direction. To his surprise, the dome that had formerly been protecting

the druids from the Blight Entity was no longer a dome. Instead it had flexed and inverted itself into almost the opposite direction, resembling a massive satellite dish as opposed to a shield. Three massive columns of plant life almost as big as the central tree itself had sprouted from the ground below to support it.

To James, it looked almost like a catcher's mitt. One that was reaching towards... Then the whole thing made sense.

He was about to speak again as he rolled over, when he was suddenly caught off guard by the arrival of a massive, darkly feathered, form.

"You're going to use the druid shield as a bottomless bag?" Prince Alixan interrupted.

The darkly feathered mantle that the prince usually wore, which James could have sworn had burned up outside Jadesport, had sprouted from his shoulders and become two massive raven-like wings with which the prince flew. Rings of bright red energy pulsed around his legs and left spirals of red magic behind him like contrails, making him go faster.

Joey looked at the massive prince with no small amount of awe. Awe that James was certain was on his face as well. Then Joey nodded.

"Arch Mage Veliry has taken the conduit into herself hasn't she?" The Crown Prince asked.

This time when Joey nodded his face bore a grim expression.

Prince Alixan nodded his own understanding. "Then we'd best hurry. What's OUR part in it?"

James snapped out of his awestruck surprise and listened. He'd have to ask questions later. For now, he listened.

"WE'RE THE BAIT!" Joey said in response, and James realized that the prince hadn't been yelling to be heard. Another question for later, since he wasn't using magic to project his voice as far as James could tell.

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"CATCH UP CHOI!" The massive were-jaguar yelled over his shoulder as he lifted his rifle back to his cheek with one hand, the other holding onto Tom's reins.

James burst into speed and caught back up to the flying SEAL.

"How the hell did you get up here?" He asked.

Vickers turned to look at him and James had to struggle not to laugh. The seal had a pair of glasses like his on. Only the arms had been covered by two strips of duct tape that held them to the front of his face sloppily.

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"Pretty much." He answered.

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"Yep." He said.

"And tall boy and your bro are probably gonna blast with magic?"

"Probably." James agreed.

"Then let's get to work." Vickers said as he shouldered his rifle again and opened fire as he kicked Tom into motion again.

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Veliry was not herself right now.

She was everything in the area.

She was the druids that held her in place even as they lent her their support.

She was the massive tree that loomed over them.

She was the woodland creatures. The birds, and beasts, and insects all, that were running from what she told them was danger.

She was the fungal spores that seeded the sky around them. The spores that multiplied faster than any fungus ever had before, refilling the voids that the entity left in the wake of its movement almost as fast as it could devour them, allowing her to see it clearly like never before.

She was the repurposed shield that moved to conform to the plan that the young man had told them about. The young man who to Veliry's mind, which seemed so inconsequential at the moment, was incredibly important. The one who had, for brief moments before, and the whole of the previous night, been a part of her.

All animals are part of each other. A deep part of her mind that wasn't really a part of it. The part that she had allowed in for the sake of this battle. That flowed around her like a storm of anger and fear and.... and love.... for all living things. ***People are of my kind too. My sentient shepherds forget this. But all that lives in nature is mine to nurture.*** The voice said. Then it took a much graver tone. ***AND DEFEND.***

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beneath them, all the animals living within that were too slow to escape, and so much more.

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Hurry Joseph. She thought as she struggled with the power flowing through her.

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He saw and felt the energy that WASN'T part of the druidic power he'd felt before when he'd inadvertently joined in on Veliry's circle.

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Please be enough. He thought.

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And as Joey plummeted toward the ground the two god-like entities of nature and destruction slammed into each other. He watched them, falling as if he was simply lying on his back, looking up at Miss Veliry's power as it clashed with the thing that wanted to devour this world.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (308/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10sxozs/wait_is_this_just_gate_307/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Whooo boy!..... That is one STEEP ass cliff! Helluva fall if you don't hold onto that one.

>!Remember that I don't know where the story is going until I write it.!<

Anyways, I'll see y'all tomorrow.

Enjoy!

\~

"SO!" James yelled as he and his brother flew through the air in their vastly different styles. "WHAT IS THE PLAN?"

Joey pointed over his shoulder and up into the sky. "THE DOME!"

James rolled over slowly as he flew and looked int he indicated direction. To his surprise, the dome that had formerly been protecting the druids from the Blight Entity was no longer a dome. Instead it had flexed and inverted itself into almost the opposite direction, resembling a massive satellite dish as opposed to a shield. Three massive columns of plant life almost as big as the central tree itself had sprouted from the ground below to support it.

To James, it looked almost like a catcher's mitt. One that was reaching towards... Then the whole thing made sense.

He was about to speak again as he rolled over, when he was suddenly caught off guard by the arrival of a massive, darkly feathered, form.

"You're going to use the druid shield as a bottomless bag?" Prince Alixan interrupted.

The darkly feathered mantle that the prince usually wore, which James could have sworn had burned up outside Jadesport, had sprouted from his shoulders and become two massive raven-like wings with which the prince flew. Rings of bright red energy pulsed around his legs and left spirals of red magic behind him like contrails, making him go faster.

Joey looked at the massive prince with no small amount of awe. Awe that James was certain was on his face as well. Then Joey nodded.

"Arch Mage Veliry has taken the conduit into herself hasn't she?" The Crown Prince asked.

This time when Joey nodded his face bore a grim expression.

Prince Alixan nodded his own understanding. "Then we'd best hurry. What's OUR part in it?"

James snapped out of his awestruck surprise and listened. He'd have to ask questions later. For now, he listened.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (307/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10rylg8/wait_is_this_just_gate_306/)

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For now his feet and clawed hands dug into the, unfortunately soft, ground beneath them. They gripped at saplings and bushes that had yet to succumb to the vacuum-like force behind them. He was using every ounce of strength his newfound body could spare to keep him low and allow him to keep making headway.

But at this point it was less like walking and more like scrambling up a nearly vertical cliff.

He was in the middle of wondering if anyone else even COULD survive this kind of devastation when the situation changed.

He reached for the stump of some kind of plant that was mostly naked of leaves when suddenly the wind stopped rushing past them and he felt his two passengers fall to the ground in a heap as he lurched and fell forward on his face.

"DON'T STOP!" A familiar voice yelled. Vickers looked up in surprise as he recognized it.

"Joey?" Amina asked from where she was regaining her feet next to him.

Ten yards away the youngest Choi stood, floating several inches off the ground, his arms outstretched in their direction. His eyes glowed with golden light that was painful to look at, and his clothes fluttered and blew as though the wind was still thrashing around them.

"NO TIME!" He yelled. "KEEP RUNNING!"

Vickers looked back and saw the approaching cliff of disappearing ground getting closer.

He didn't need to be told twice. Before they could react he wrapped his arms around the two women and began to run past the young man at a sprint, which for him was fast enough to dominate the autobahn.

Once they'd gotten clear Joey vanished in a blur and an explosion of the ground beneath his feet.

\-------------------------

James regained his senses only a moment before the log that had knocked him out of the air disappeared. He saw the massive inky form of the blight entity's expanding form in his right eye and knew that he was only a split second from following it.

He didn't know what would happen he did. He'd managed to resist the vanishing powers of the blight possessed outside of Jadesport. But it had been a close thing, and he'd only managed it through luck. And even then he'd lost all his Petravian equipment and felt like he was being ripped apart.

Who know what would happen now that he'd been here this long. Hell, even if he still proved immune, would his wolf arm? Or would he be left a cripple?

He didn't feel like finding out.

James's eyes glowed with gold light as he slowed down his perception of the world around him.

He scanned around to find an opening.

When he did he saw a world of inky black tentacles. And the only safe way out, relatively speaking, was behind him. And the tentacles were moving much faster now. And he needed to get turned around before he could get out.

Or did he?

He'd had the thought before. He'd just always been worried about what would happen to his teeth.

Energy gathered in his head as he focused it on his slowly opening mouth.

His magic stuttered a bit as he sensed a magical presence getting close to him that felt familiar, even as it made the hair on his left arm puff up in fear. He saw a blur of gold light approach that was almost too fast for him to track, and when he looked he saw someone who couldn't, and shouldn't, have been there for numerous reasons.

And then, hundreds of feet off the ground and in the middle of a writhing mass of tentacles of world ending destruction, his little brother tackled him.

Then he was hurtling through the open air like a comet, falling backwards and away from the blight entity with at least half a mile of distance between them.

And Joey was RUNNING through the air above him.

"JOEY!" He yelled as he plummeted.

"NO TIME!" His younger brother yelled. "CATCH UP!"

Oh, hell no you didn't. James thought as the childishly competitive part of his mind kicked him into a reaction.

James tucked into a roll and focused his energy on his feet.

\----------

Joey's thoughts were so fast and frantic that they couldn't be put on paper if he'd tried and had a whole day to translate them into words.

He was thinking of everything around him at once, while focusing only on whatever task he was actively doing. For now that meant moving fast.

He had a part of his mind focused on how it would pull of THE PLAN. But that could wait until he found Miss Veliry.

Part of his mind was focusing on keeping his eye magic running. He needed it at these speeds, especially with how the blight entity had sped itself up, and with all the plant life still falling from the sky, a large portion of which would be helpful if he could pull this off.

A part of his mind tangential to that part remembered what his teacher had taught him about making bottomless bags from scratch, which he'd done several times as practice to help him eventually learn full enchantment. Bottomless bags were commonly used as the first step to that field. That was what he would need to do now.

Another part was controlling the wind magic that was simultaneously stabilizing the air around him to help the people he was passing, and also allowing him to slide through it like a slipstream. Wind magic was the one type of magic that Joey had learned well enough to use in an emergency, and he used it now to move like nothing else. Images of bullets in slow motion, the SR-71 Blackbird and it's descendant the SRI

-34 Merlin, F1 race cars in wind tunnels, and birds of prey diving through the air ran through that part of his mind. Everything he'd ever learned about wind resistance, vortices, eddies, and aerodynamic flowed through his brain as he moved between currents of wind like a golden-lit wraith even as his feet pressed on cushions of air like they were stepping stones.

The rest of his mind, simultaneously overwhelmed AND focused as it was, processed everything around him.

And Joseph Choi flew while running like an Olympian.

Only a few scant few heartbeats after he'd saved him, his brother managed to catch up to him, twin jets of heat energy trailing from his feet.

"What are you doing here?" He yelled over the wind rushing past them.

"Helping." Joey answered. "Where's Miss Veliry? We'll need her."

James spun and dropped a bit to dodge a piece of falling tree, then rose back up.

"She went to the druids. You have a plan?" James asked.

"Yeah..... Well... more of an idea with a lot of hope. And we'll need them too." Joey said. He pointed up. "And we need to do it before the dome falls entirely."

"Then you better keep up." James said with a grin as he pushed himself to fly even faster.

Joey smirked. "You only caught up because I'm stabilizing the wind big bro." He retorted as he began running faster. He flew past James and smiled as he saw his older brother's look of shocked upset.

\------------------------

When the two brothers made it to the sight where the Five had fallen, they learned the hard way that Veliry was the only reason the dome above HADN'T fallen entirely.

Druids of all types, sizes, and even colors cried out as the two of them landed on the massive mushroom, sticking off of the even more massive tree the dominated the landscape,where the Five had been seated. Where they had been, several small forests of different kinds, and one large stone and sand column, had sprouted. And where another had sat there was now a massive chunk of the mushroom platform that was missing.

Veliry stood in the middle of their ruined forms, surrounded by a throng of the druids that had been aiding them in the casting that had raised the defenses, and as the two Choi's looked at her they couldn't tell if the druids were attempting to pull her away from the area, or help her stay there.

They were grabbing her, arms and legs and waist and shoulders alike. Some of them looked as if they had been on the verge of hauling her away from the Five. The rest looked as if they were joining her in prayer. It reminded James of how the werefolk had looked after he'd helped inter Kela. And they were chanting in hauntingly deep tones that vibrated through the very air around them.

Veliry glowed with a swirling mixture of colors that to James reminded him of images he'd seen of tropical beaches and birds of paradise. To Joey those same colors brought memories of fall leaves and forest animals foraging for the winter.

A pair of massive, many pointed, antlers sprouted from the sides of her head and dried blood marked where they had burst through her skin. Her arms were aimed at the sky above and seemed to shimmer as they shifted rapidly between being feathered, scaled, furred, and bare. The two brothers could feel the magical energy flowing from all around them, through her, and into the sky above. A thick growth of moss was covering her skin from her neck, down under her shirt, and down her left arm until the elbow. Roots that looked redder than beets anchored her feet to the mushroom beneath her feet. Her eyes, with sideways pupils like those of a goat were locked onto the upper branches of the great tree that she and the mushroom stood upon.

Into the dome above.

Joey rushed to her side.

"Miss Veliry?" He asked as he wedged his way between two of the druids and grabbed her shoulders.

Joey's head snapped backwards and his back arched as his mind flooded with images, and sounds, and smells, tastes, and even feelings of everything around him. His mouth opened as if to scream even though the only sound he made was a gasp of shock.

"JOEY!" James yelled as he reached for his brother.

"LEAVE HIM!" A voice that seemed to come from everywhere at once said, making James's bones ache. He realized that it was coming from the druids, who'd temporarily halted their chanting to speak, and from Veliry AND his brother.

James froze mid step as he recoiled at the sudden outburst.

Joey spasmed in a fashion that looked painful to James, but his hands never left his teacher's, and lover's, shoulders.

Suddenly Veliry's head snapped down to look at James and her mouth opened to reveal a set of insect like pincers at the corners of her lips that he thought came from a centipede. At the same moment that she did, Joey's hands flew off of her shoulder as he stumbled back into James's surprised arms.

"DO IT!" They all said, minus Joey now. **"HURRY! OR THE INTERLOPER SHALL DO AS THE OTHERS DID!"**

"They mean Miss Veliry." Joey said weakly as he regained his feet and held his head in between his hands. "We need to move."

"What?" James asked as his brother pushed away from him and stumbled into a jog. "What just happened."

Joey shook his head.

"Explain later. Work now." His little brother said as he jumped into the air. "We're gonna use the dome!"

"WHAT?" James asked in confusion. But his little brother was already moving through the air with that odd running/flying style that he had. "Oh.... Fuck it!" James said as he leaped up to follow.

And they began flying back towards the Entity.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10vf0gj/wait_is_this_just_gate_308/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (307/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10ryjw2/wait_is_this_just_gate_306/) /
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He reached for the stump of some kind of plant that was mostly naked of leaves when suddenly the wind stopped rushing past them and he felt his two passengers fall to the ground in a heap as he lurched and fell forward on his face.

"DON'T STOP!" A familiar voice yelled. Vickers looked up in surprise as he recognized it.

"Joey?" Amina asked from where she was regaining her feet next to him.

Ten yards away the youngest Choi stood, floating several inches off the ground, his arms outstretched in their direction. His eyes glowed with golden light that was painful to look at, and his clothes fluttered and blew as though the wind was still thrashing around them.

"NO TIME!" He yelled. "KEEP RUNNING!"

Vickers looked back and saw the approaching cliff of disappearing ground getting closer.

He didn't need to be told twice. Before they could react he wrapped his arms around the two women and began to run past the young man at a sprint, which for him was fast enough to dominate the autobahn.

Once they'd gotten clear Joey vanished in a blur and an explosion of the ground beneath his feet.

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James regained his senses only a moment before the log that had knocked him out of the air disappeared. He saw the massive inky form of the blight entity's expanding form in his right eye and knew that he was only a split second from following it.

He didn't know what would happen if he did. He'd managed to resist the vanishing powers of the blight possessed outside of Jadesport. But it had been a close thing, and he'd only managed it through luck. And even then he'd lost all his Petravian equipment and felt like he was being ripped apart.

Who knew what would happen now that he'd been here this long. Hell, even if he still proved immune, would his wolf arm? Or would he be left a cripple?

He didn't feel like finding out.

James's eyes glowed with gold light as he slowed down his perception of the world around him.

He scanned around to find an opening.

When he did he saw a world of inky black tentacles. And the only safe way out, relatively speaking, was behind him. And the tentacles were moving much faster now. And he needed to get turned around before he could get out.

Or did he?

He'd had the thought before. He'd just always been worried about what would happen to his teeth.

Energy gathered in his head as he focused it on his slowly opening mouth.

His magic stuttered a bit as he sensed a magical presence getting close to him that felt familiar, even as it made the hair on his left arm puff up in fear. He saw a blur of gold light approach that was almost too fast for him to track, and when he looked he saw someone who couldn't, and shouldn't, have been there for numerous reasons.

And then, hundreds of feet off the ground and in the middle of a writhing mass of tentacles of world ending destruction, his little brother tackled him.

Then he was hurtling through the open air like a comet, falling backwards and away from the blight entity with at least half a mile of distance between them.

And Joey was RUNNING through the air above him.

"JOEY!" He yelled as he plummeted.

"NO TIME!" His younger brother yelled. "CATCH UP!"

Oh, hell no you didn't. James thought as the childishly competitive part of his mind kicked him into a reaction.

James tucked into a roll and focused his energy on his feet.

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Joey's thoughts were so fast and frantic that they couldn't be put on paper if he'd tried and had a whole day to translate them into words.

He was thinking of everything around him at once, while focusing only on whatever task he was actively doing. For now that meant moving fast.

He had a part of his mind focused on how it would pull of THE PLAN. But that could wait until he found Miss Veliry.

Part of his mind was focusing on keeping his eye magic running. He needed it at these speeds, especially with how the blight entity had sped itself up, and with all the plant life still falling from the sky, a large portion of which would be helpful if he could pull this off.

A part of his mind tangential to that part remembered what his teacher had taught him about making bottomless bags from scratch, which he'd done several times as practice to help him eventually learn full enchantment. Bottomless bags were commonly used as the first step to that field. That was what he would need to do now.

Another part was controlling the wind magic that was simultaneously stabilizing the air around him to help the people he was passing, and also allowing him to slide through it like a slipstream. Wind magic was the one type of magic that Joey had learned well enough to use in an emergency, and he used it now to move like nothing else. Images of bullets in slow motion, the SR-71 Blackbird and it's descendant the SRI - 34 Merlin, F1 race cars in wind tunnels, and birds of prey diving through the air ran through that part of his mind. Everything he'd ever learned about wind resistance, vortices, eddies, and aerodynamic flowed through his brain as he moved between currents of wind like a golden-lit wraith even as his feet pressed on cushions of air like they were stepping stones.

The rest of his mind, simultaneously overwhelmed AND focused as it was, processed everything around him.

And Joseph Choi flew while running like an Olympian.

Only a few scant few heartbeats after he'd saved him, his brother managed to catch up to him, twin jets of heat energy trailing from his feet.

"What are you doing here?" He yelled over the wind rushing past them.

"Helping." Joey answered. "Where's Miss Veliry? We'll need her."

James spun and dropped a bit to dodge a piece of falling tree, then rose back up.

"She went to the druids. You have a plan?" James asked.

"Yeah..... Well... more of an idea with a lot of hope. And we'll need them too." Joey said. He pointed up. "And we need to do it before the dome falls entirely."

"Then you better keep up." James said with a grin as he pushed himself to fly even faster.

Joey smirked. "You only caught up because I'm stabilizing the wind big bro." He retorted as he began running faster. He flew past James and smiled as he saw his older brother's look of shocked upset.

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When the two brothers made it to the sight where the Five had fallen, they learned the hard way that Veliry was the only reason the dome above HADN'T fallen entirely.

Druids of all types, sizes, and even colors cried out as the two of them landed on the massive mushroom, sticking off of the even more massive tree the dominated the landscape,where the Five had been seated. Where they had been, several small forests of different kinds, and one large stone and sand column, had sprouted. And where another had sat there was now a massive chunk of the mushroom platform that was missing.

Veliry stood in the middle of their ruined forms, surrounded by a throng of the druids that had been aiding them in the casting that had raised the defenses, and as the two Choi's looked at her they couldn't tell if the druids were attempting to pull her away from the area, or help her stay there.

They were grabbing her, arms and legs and waist and shoulders alike. Some of them looked as if they had been on the verge of hauling her away from the Five. The rest looked as if they were joining her in prayer. It reminded James of how the werefolk had looked after he'd helped inter Kela. And they were chanting in hauntingly deep tones that vibrated through the very air around them.

Veliry glowed with a swirling mixture of colors that to James reminded him of images he'd seen of tropical beaches and birds of paradise. To Joey those same colors brought memories of fall leaves and forest animals foraging for the winter.

A pair of massive, many pointed, antlers sprouted from the sides of her head and dried blood marked where they had burst through her skin. Her arms were aimed at the sky above and seemed to shimmer as they shifted rapidly between being feathered, scaled, furred, and bare. The two brothers could feel the magical energy flowing from all around them, through her, and into the sky above. A thick growth of moss was covering her skin from her neck, down under her shirt, and down her left arm until the elbow. Roots that looked redder than beets anchored her feet to the mushroom beneath her feet. Her eyes, with sideways pupils like those of a goat were locked onto the upper branches of the great tree that she and the mushroom stood upon.

Into the dome above.

Joey rushed to her side.

"Miss Veliry?" He asked as he wedged his way between two of the druids and grabbed her shoulders.

Joey's head snapped backwards and his back arched as his mind flooded with images, and sounds, and smells, tastes, and even feelings of everything around him. His mouth opened as if to scream even though the only sound he made was a gasp of shock.

"JOEY!" James yelled as he reached for his brother.

"LEAVE HIM!" A voice that seemed to come from everywhere at once said, making James's bones ache. He realized that it was coming from the druids, who'd temporarily halted their chanting to speak, and from Veliry AND his brother.

James froze mid step as he recoiled at the sudden outburst.

Joey spasmed in a fashion that looked painful to James, but his hands never left his teacher's, and lover's, shoulders.

Suddenly Veliry's head snapped down to look at James and her mouth opened to reveal a set of insect like pincers at the corners of her lips that he thought came from a centipede. At the same moment that she did, Joey's hands flew off of her shoulder as he stumbled back into James's surprised arms.

"DO IT!" They all said, minus Joey now. **"HURRY! OR THE INTERLOPER SHALL DO AS THE OTHERS DID!"**

"They mean Miss Veliry." Joey said weakly as he regained his feet and held his head in between his hands. "We need to move."

"What?" James asked as his brother pushed away from him and stumbled into a jog. "What just happened."

Joey shook his head.

"Explain later. Work now." His little brother said as he jumped into the air. "We're gonna use the dome!"

"WHAT?" James asked in confusion. But his little brother was already moving through the air with that odd running/flying style that he had. "Oh.... Fuck it!" James said as he leaped up to follow.

And they began flying back towards the Entity.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10veyb5/wait_is_this_just_gate_308/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (306/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10r6dy4/wait_is_this_just_gate_305/)

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Then the final druid ancient, the last of the group known as the Five, had died. There had been a massive roar of pain from somewhere behind him, and James had felt the magical energy of the area surging.

He hadn't understood at first. Why was the druid even still maintaining the massive living wall of plant life? They had not need of it anymore.

Then he had seen light bloom above him. Had seen the massive hole in the wall form a few hundred yards higher in the sky.

His glasses had shown him the squirming, otherwise invisible, tendril as it had snaked down and swiped at a group of people some hundred yards to his left.

He'd tried to warn them. But the tendril moved faster than he'd expected, and in a heartbeat the five people were devoured.

Then the last of the Five had detonated. And at almost the exact same moment, as energy flooded around him and everyone else, the bag's enchantment began to fail from the damage to its vessel.

Pink light began to glow from between the countless seams, at the stitching, and at the edge of the area the entity had taken, as the bag's magic unraveled.

James had never seen a bottomless bag fail before. He'd been warned about it, and had even had a couple of his bags damaged to near failure. But he'd never seen one actually fail.

As he raced away from the bag he became glad that it was empty.

There was a loud noise like nothing James had ever heard before. He was reminded of the noise that a soda can might make when being opened, only it was as if he was hearing the opposite of that. His brain struggled to understand the notion even as it heard it.

Then, James felt himself being pulled backwards in a rush.

He had a moment, brief as it was, to remember what he'd been taught about the destruction of bottomless bags. How they would violently expel anything inside them with enough energy to actually be hazardous to anyone nearby.

Normally, an empty bag would do little more than puff out a bit of magically charged air, and he wondered however briefly, why theirs hadn't done that.

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As he unleashed a larger blast from his feet, and was surprised to find he had gained no ground, he looked back and saw someone with a set of wings sprouting from their back as they disappeared in mid air.

The lens of his glasses that was still active showed the expanding cloud of dark cold space as it encroached rapidly.

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He felt himself gain a few feet and didn't bother looking back as he did.

Then something massive, and green, and rigid fell onto him from above and James began to fall.

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his new senses he heard the chorus of screams and wails of mourning that came from some miles away as the people helping the druid cried out.

He also heard the cacophony of startled exclamations up above as something happened to the people holding the upper side of the bag's opening.

He looked up and saw the piece of it that the entity destroyed first. Saw the small group of people disappear along with it.

"No." Princess Amina said softly from a few yards away.

Then the bag began to glow it's bright pink light around them.

"Oh, shit." He said.

"EVERYBODY RUN!!!!" The princess yelled as she herself began sprinting away.

The soldiers around them began bolting, and Vickers was one of them. He stumbled at first, having only done a small amount of running on his new legs so far, and still not being used to them all the way.

But as he did he moved faster than any of them. He'd already been faster than any Petravian as a human, his magically enhanced Earth muscle making him stronger and more capable than them by a large margin when it came to physical ability. Only werewolves had been capable of keeping up.

And now that he was one of the were, even they moved like they were in slow motion.

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The two of them rolled backwards quickly before Atrafar managed to sink her silvered gauntlets into the ground and anchor them. Their roles reversed as she grabbed the handle on the back of his vest and kept him from rolling any further.

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Some piece of the dome slammed into his face, some kind of wide leaf that in the current conditions slapped him like a paddle, knocking him back just a bit. He absently looked back at it and saw it disappear only a few yards behind them.

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But so did the blight entity.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10r6ci6/wait_is_this_just_gate_305/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Writer's note: In which a Great Value Brand Lord of the Rings army meets a Lovecraftian horror in battle. Grab the popcorn.

Enjoy.

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When all was said and done, it took nearly three hours to get the container, that would become the bottomless bag weapon, constructed after James arrived in the druid forest.

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Metal pipes and poles and beams were welded using fire and lightning magic. Oars and spears and staffs and boards were nailed, tied, and even glued together and joined to the metal by fastenings of all sorts before

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The wall protecting them did much the same, and the two Choi brothers watched in fearful awe as the writhing tentacles of the blight entity took advantage of the temporary weakness to devour even more of it.

James joined in once the bag was complete and the casters that Veliry had brought over began tracing intricate runes and symbols on the inside of the bag's body in large strokes of red paint that glittered with bits of material. They cast forth with the bright pint magic that James had seen before as each of them lent their power to the creation of the new bottomless space.

They backed out slowly as the back/bottom of the bag began to glow, first with the bright pink light coming from their hands, then darkening to the dark black abyss that marked the artificially induced extra dimensional space. They continued, pouring more and more magic into the container even as some of them, Veliry included, kept the black space contained and stable while they added to it.

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The mages, and laborers, and druids, and soldiers, all looked at her as if she was mad. James could see the looks of doubt on their faces. They were tired, and the sensation of the druid leader detonating only a few minutes before they'd enchanted the bag still weighed on them.

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"IF YOU'RE FROM THE CAPITAL RAISE YOUR HAND!" He shouted as loud as he could. Most of the soldiers and mages raised their hands, and James noticed that the ones on the far side of the bag weren't even looking at him, and probably couldn't hear him.

He pointed at the wall, just in time for a hole to form and shift back and forth. He couldn't help but notice that it filled itself in a lot slower than before.

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Some of the people nearby began to nod, most of them were already moving to stand back up.

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He watched in mute horror as the one he'd warned them about began to convulse. Vines, moss, flowers, and tree branches began to erupt erupt from their body with wet tearing noises that he could hear even over the chanting of the druids around them, some of whom rushed to aid them. red feathers flew as the skin they were previously rooted in tore and burst. They screamed as a small forest of plant life exploded from the bird like druid as the magical energy overwhelmed what their already formidable body could handle. Several of the closest druids were injured by the sudden, and violent, act of creation. One of them was even impaled through the leg by something that looked like a cactus spine.

And as Joey panned the camera over to look at the last of the Five he saw the turtle-like and lichen crusted person beginning to strain. Druids of all kinds were at their side and Joey knew that if he'd been there in person he'd've been able to feel magical energy flowing like a maelstrom.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (305/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10q9aoh/wait_is_this_just_gate_304/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: In which a Great Value Brand Lord of the Rings army meets a Lovecraftian horror in battle. Grab the popcorn.

Enjoy.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (304/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10pcgf5/wait_is_this_just_gate_303/)

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"Who all's over there?" James asked as he and Amina found Vickers waiting a few yards away from the self supporting door that had been set up in the main entryway of the castle.

The door was nearly as wide as that of a stable, or maybe the castle great hall, and a constant stream of soldiers and mages moved in and out of each side carrying bundles of cloth, various poles, and bundles of rope.

"The little redhead mage. That spider guy. The non-douche prince. You know, the tall one. Atrafar for some reason. And about a hundred other people." The massive were-jaguar said in a rumble.

James couldn't deny that Vickers looked absolutely badass in his new form. He was further along the transition to full jaguar at this point. His camo pants were cuffed just above his knees since they wouldn't fit any further down. His vest was fitting only in the loosest of definitions, its straps extended as far as they would go. And he had a dark black hooded jacket that had been made in this world underneath it. He had his shield on his back and had forgone a rifle in favor of a massive wooden mallet that James thought might have been meant for some kind of construction work rather than battle. But when he looked at the man's hands he saw why. His fingers likely wouldn't fit into a trigger well without some extensive modification.

"Dude you look fuckin insane." He said as they began walking toward the door. "What's your girlfriend doing over there?"

Vickers glossed over the title. He and Atrafar hadn't had THAT conversation yet.

"Helping." He said simply.

"You really catch Driscoll last night?" James asked.

Vickers see-sawed his hand. "He turned himself in." He said. "I take it the King told you what's going on?"

"He caught us this morning." Amina said as she fiddled with the holster to her new 1911.

Vickers eyed the pistol. Then he looked over at James, in his mish-mash of Earth military garb and Petravian gear, and saw the massive revolver in the place of his standard issue pistol, which had been relocated to the front of his vest.

"Wedding gifts." James said.

"Nice." Vickers replied with only a small amount of jealousy.

"I'll see if they can get one in Panthro sizing later." James said with a grin.

"Shut up and lets get to work." Vickers snapped back as he stepped through the door.

James followed suit. He felt his equilibrium go haywire for a moment and was reminded of the fact that last time he'd used one of these doors he'd been unconscious. Then he was on the other side.

And was surrounded by a world that exploded with color.

James looked around at the setting on the other side and leaped out of the way as Amina stumbled into his back as she emerged from the door behind him.

"Woah." He said as he saw all the lush vegetation around him.

"Mask up." Vickers said, breaking him out of his awestruck wonder as the SEAL handed him a piece of red cloth that hummed with low magical energy.

James pressed it to his face and tied it behind his head as the other two did the same. The King had already told him about the way the Druids were "imaging" the creature, whatever it was.

Then he looked up at the massive tree that dominated the landscape.

And he kept looking up.

And further up.

He kept craning his neck back until he threatened to fall over backwards.

"Jesus." He said softly.

"That is a bit of a sight." Vickers admitted. "Look at the wall."

James turned and saw the massive living wall of plant-life.

"Woah." He said again.

"Gentlemen." Amina interrupted. "Child-like wonder later. We've got lives to save."

That snapped James out of it. He turned back to face them and saw Vickers already moving to follow the stream of supplies over to a clearing a few hundred yards away.

He ignored the subtle shaking that his sword was doing on the side of his belt opposite of his holstered revolver.

And behind them, a section of the living wall disappeared before rapidly regenerating back into place.

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Joey managed to catch one of the mages on their way to the door way and pulled them aside. They turned to him in surprise, nearly dropping the numerous metal pipes they were carrying.

"Ah. Mr. Choi." The young elf said as they recognized him. "How can I help you?" He made a point of not looking at Joey's glowing eyes as he spoke.

Joey took one of the throat microphones he'd gotten from the communication hub room and handed it to the man, who juggled their grip a bit as they kept the pipes under control.

"Just get that to the Arch Mage and let her know that I said for her to wear it." Joey said as he attempted to sound authoritative. "She'll know what it is."

"Are you not going?" The mage asked. "I assumed you would. Being her apprentice and all."

Joey looked over to where he could see a bit of the door down the hallway. He felt his thumb rub the scars on his palm again.

"No." He said. "No I'm um. I'm gonna help coordinate things here." He replied

The elf mage considered it, then simply nodded. "I'll get it to her." He said and resumed his walk toward the door again.

"Thank you." Joey called behind them. Then he headed back to the communication hub. "Good luck!"

When he got to the communication hub he put his own microphone on, a headset style piece that hooked directly into the machine, and pulled up the drone control screen. He took over a few of the spare drones that were in a box in the Summoning room. They were there in case any in the network around the capital had issues. But they'd work for today.

He took control of four of them, telling them to lift up one at a time. It was a pain to juggle their controls, especially since it was his first time interacting with them. But the interface was remarkably similar to the program his high school had used in their electronics lab. In fact he thought it was a bit simpler. And after a few minutes of

searching he found the setting to make them follow each other. Then he made them fly through the halls and toward the door.

"Joseph?" Veliry's voice called out in his ears. "Are you there? Why did you have An'Arkius give me a microphone?"

"Hi Miss Veliry." He said. He still wasn't sure where the two of them stood with each other now. She'd kind of stormed off to save the world before they'd gotten a chance to talk about it. "You forgot to take yours this morning when you left."

"I... Thank you-" She began

"Jojo?" His brother's voice asked, interrupting her. "What do you mean 'this morning when she left'? Didn't this all happen at like-" Then James went silent for a moment as it clicked for him. "Oh."

"Damn kid." The rumbling voice of Chief Vickers weighed in. "Nice."

"Everyone get the hell off of the line!" Veliry interrupted in an agitated voice.

There were a few moments of awkward silence as Joey sat at the hub with his face burning hot and scarlet red. His eyes were glowing furiously. He didn't know it, but Veliry was in much the same state, minus the eyes.

"Joseph." She began. "We can talk about that after this is all over. For now. What is going on? Why did you send me a throat mic?" She asked in slow, precise, words that even he could tell meant she was upset.

Joey gulped.

"I'm... gonna help." He said after a moment. "But I'm... not going through the door. Not this time." Then he told the drones to go through the door in his place as they reached the room in question. "But I am sending drones. I'll... be you're um.... info guy. Or overwatch, or whatever." He said. "James will know what I mean."

"I understand." She said. "That makes a lot of sense. Thank you."

Joey hesitated as he looked at the screen. And at the four little lights near the channel they were on.

"Um guys?" He said. "I'm at the comms hub right now. I know you... didn't actually switch channels."

There was another awkward silence.

"Seriously kid. Mad respect." Vickers said after a few moments.

"Vickers I'm going to skin you alive and use your fur for a rug when this is over." Veliry said harshly. "And I'll use magic to make sure you stay awake for it."

"Meeeeoooowww." Said James before mocking a hiss.

"CHOI!" Vickers cut in.

Joey manipulated his headset microphone into one of its own ear speakers and hit them with feedback for a few seconds.

When he put the headset back on he was greeted by a chorus of "Ow!"'s and one "What the fuck man?"

"Giant inter-dimensional universe devourer everyone." He said. "Let's stay focused."

Then as the drones made their way out the other side of the door, with some INTERESTING footage, he began to maneuver them into position.

His phone pinged with a single message.

>James: Does mom know?

Instead of replying on the phone he simply spoke into the headset.

"Yes James." Then as he began looking through the drone's cameras, flipping through view modes as he did, he spoke again. "Hey James? Chief Vickers?"

"Yeah?" They responded in unison.

"Do you guys still have those cool sunglasses that you used before?" His eyes widened and he unconsciously recoiled a bit as he saw one of the tendrils move through the dome that the druids had raised.

"Uh. Yeah." Vickers responded first. "Don't uh.... well. They don't fit me anymore."

"Mine got broken when the Miffy's shot me." James admitted glumly.

"Chief. Go IR with them and take a peek at the wall the next time a piece of it goes missing." He said. "Then give them to James, since he can actually wear them."

"Um.... okay." Vickers replied curiously. A few minutes later he spoke again. "Oh.... Damn. Good eye kid."

A few moments later James replied in a very similar fashion.

"James." Joey said. "You've got the glasses. Everyone else. I'll do what I can to help you stay out of the way of those things using the drones. Can you guys see if the druids can raise a couple tall, preferably limbless trees? The drones don't have a lot of fly time left on their batteries."

"I'll ask." Amina chimed in.

"That's fuckin biiiiiiig." James said. "God damn."

And as much as he hated it, Joey began to doubt the plan.

Wait, is this just GATE? (304/?)

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Vickers eyed the pistol. Then he looked over at James, in his mish-mash of Earth military garb and Petravian gear, and saw the massive revolver in the place of his standard issue pistol, which had been relocated to the front of his vest.

"Wedding gifts." James said.

"Nice." Vickers replied with only a small amount of jealousy.

"I'll see if they can get one in Panthro sizing later." James said with a grin.

"Shut up and lets get to work." Vickers snapped back as he stepped through the door.

James followed suit. He felt his equilibrium go haywire for a moment and was reminded of the fact that last time he'd used one of these doors he'd been unconscious. Then he was on the other side.

And was surrounded by a world that exploded with color.

James looked around at the setting on the other side and leaped out of the way as Amina stumbled into his back as she emerged from the door behind him.

"Woah." He said as he saw all the lush vegetation around him.

"Mask up." Vickers said, breaking him out of his awestruck wonder as the SEAL handed him a piece of red cloth that hummed with low magical energy.

James pressed it to his face and tied it behind his head as the other two did the same. The King had already told him about the way the Druids were "imaging" the creature, whatever it was.

Then he looked up at the massive tree that dominated the landscape.

And he kept looking up.

And further up.

He kept craning his neck back until he threatened to fall over backwards.

"Jesus." He said softly.

"That is a bit of a sight." Vickers admitted. "Look at the wall."

James turned and saw the massive living wall of plant-life.

"Woah." He said again.

"Gentlemen." Amina interrupted. "Child-like wonder later. We've got lives to save."

That snapped James out of it. He turned back to face them and saw Vickers already moving to follow the stream of supplies over to a clearing a few hundred yards away.

He ignored the subtle shaking that his sword was doing on the side of his belt opposite of his holstered revolver.

And behind them, a section of the living wall disappeared before rapidly regenerating back into place.

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Joey managed to catch one of the mages on their way to the door way and pulled them aside. They turned to him in surprise, nearly dropping the numerous metal pipes they were carrying.

"Ah. Mr. Choi." The young elf said as they recognized him. "How can I help you?" He made a point of not looking at Joey's glowing eyes as he spoke.

Joey took one of the throat microphones he'd gotten from the communication hub room and handed it to the man, who juggled their grip a bit as they kept the pipes under control.

"Just get that to the Arch Mage and let her know that I said for her to wear it." Joey said as he attempted to sound authoritative. "She'll know what it is."

"Are you not going?" The mage asked. "I assumed you would. Being her apprentice and all."

Joey looked over to where he could see a bit of the door down the hallway. He felt his thumb rub the scars on his palm again.

"No." He said. "No I'm um. I'm gonna help coordinate things here." He replied

The elf mage considered it, then simply nodded. "I'll get it to her." He said and resumed his walk toward the door again.

"Thank you." Joey called behind them. Then he headed back to the communication hub. "Good luck!"

When he got to the communication hub he put his own microphone on, a headset style piece that hooked directly into the machine, and pulled up the drone control screen. He took over a few of the spare drones that were in a box in the Summoning room. They were there in case any in the network around the capital had issues. But they'd work for today.

He took control of four of them, telling them to lift up one at a time. It was a pain to juggle their controls, especially since it was his first

time interacting with them. But the interface was remarkably similar to the program his high school had used in their electronics lab. In fact he thought it was a bit simpler. And after a few minutes of searching he found the setting to make them follow each other. Then he made them fly through the halls and toward the door.

"Joseph?" Veliry's voice called out in his ears. "Are you there? Why did you have An'Arkius give me a microphone?"

"Hi Miss Veliry." He said. He still wasn't sure where the two of them stood with each other now. She'd kind of stormed off to save the world before they'd gotten a chance to talk about it. "You forgot to take yours this morning when you left."

"I... Thank you-" She began

"Jojo?" His brother's voice asked, interrupting her. "What do you mean 'this morning when she left'? Didn't this all happen at like-" Then James went silent for a moment as it clicked for him. "Oh."

"Damn kid." The rumbling voice of Chief Vickers weighed in. "Nice."

"Everyone get the hell off of the line!" Veliry interrupted in an agitated voice.

There were a few moments of awkward silence as Joey sat at the hub with his face burning hot and scarlet red. His eyes were glowing furiously. He didn't know it, but Veliry was in much the same state, minus the eyes.

"Joseph." She began. "We can talk about that after this is all over. For now. What is going on? Why did you send me a throat mic?" She asked in slow, precise, words that even he could tell meant she was upset.

Joey gulped.

"I'm... gonna help." He said after a moment. "But I'm... not going through the door. Not this time." Then he told the drones to go through the door in his place as they reached the room in question. "But I am sending drones. I'll... be you're um.... info guy. Or overwatch, or whatever." He said. "James will know what I mean."

"I understand." She said. "That makes a lot of sense. Thank you."

Joey hesitated as he looked at the screen. And at the four little lights near the channel they were on.

"Um guys?" He said. "I'm at the comms hub right now. I know you... didn't actually switch channels."

There was another awkward silence.

"Seriously kid. Mad respect." Vickers said after a few moments.

"Vickers I'm going to skin you alive and use your fur for a rug when this is over." Veliry said harshly. "And I'll use magic to make sure you stay awake for it."

"Meeeeoooowww." Said James before mocking a hiss.

"CHOI!" Vickers cut in.

Joey manipulated his headset microphone into one of its own ear speakers and hit them with feedback for a few seconds.

When he put the headset back on he was greeted by a chorus of "Ow!"'s and one "What the fuck man?"

"Giant inter-dimensional universe devourer everyone." He said. "Let's stay focused."

Then as the drones made their way out the other side of the door, with some INTERESTING footage, he began to maneuver them into position.

His phone pinged with a single message.

>James: Does mom know?

Instead of replying on the phone he simply spoke into the headset.

"Yes James." Then as he began looking through the drone's cameras, flipping through view modes as he did, he spoke again. "Hey James? Chief Vickers?"

"Yeah?" They responded in unison.

"Do you guys still have those cool sunglasses that you used before?" His eyes widened and he unconsciously recoiled a bit as he saw one of the tendrils move through the dome that the druids had raised.

"Uh. Yeah." Vickers responded first. "Don't uh.... well. They don't fit me anymore."

"Mine got broken when the Miffy's shot me." James admitted glumly.

"Chief. Go IR with them and take a peek at the wall the next time a piece of it goes missing." He said. "Then give them to James, since he can actually wear them."

"Um.... okay." Vickers replied curiously. A few minutes later he spoke again. "Oh.... Damn. Good eye kid."

A few moments later James replied in a very similar fashion.

"James." Joey said. "You've got the glasses. Everyone else. I'll do what I can to help you stay out of the way of those things using the drones. Can you guys see if the druids can raise a couple tall, preferably

limbless trees? The drones don't have a lot of fly time left on their batteries."

"I'll ask." Amina chimed in.

"That's fuckin biiiiiiig." James said. "God damn."

And as much as he hated it, Joey began to doubt the plan.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10r6ci6/wait_is_this_just_gate_305/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (303/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10my5qc/wait_is_this_just_gate_302/)

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"Yeah?" She asked sleepily.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (303/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10my46e/wait_is_this_just_gate_302/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (302/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10m1o0n/wait_is_this_just_gate_301/)

Writer's note: Mexican moms just know bro.

Enjoy

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When Vickers emerged from Atrafar's room the next day, he did so while suppressing a grin.

His legs hurt.

His back and arms hurt.

His jaw and tongue even hurt a bit, side effects of having his new mouth structure tested (in more ways than one), and he felt more than a little dehydrated.

But as he heard the gentle rumbling snore of the exhausted Outer Light knight slumbering inside, he couldn't help but let the grin show for a few moments as he stretched his back a bit.

Then he saw a mage go running by in a hurry.

He didn't know this one, not by name anyways, but he could hear their heart jack-hammering inside their chest and knew that they were in some kind of excited state.

So he decided to follow them. It was easy in his new state.

Only a few moments later he came across a small squad of the guards who were half running in the same direction.

One of them recognized him.

"Chief Vickers." They greeted. "Someone found and got word to you?"

"Uh. No?" He said hesitantly. He thought the sergeant's name was Rorik or something like that. "Why? What's happening?"

"The blight's acting up again." The man replied. "We're being scrambled to help the druids."

"Druids?" He asked in surprise at the unexpected news. "What? Shit."

He changed his direction and began moving faster even as he noticed that there were more and more castle guards now.

"Where are you going sir?" The Sergeant asked behind him.

"Gearing up." He said. "Be there in a minute."

And he began jogging toward his room.

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Veliry, fully dressed now, paced back and forth at the front of the room as she explained what was happening, and what the plan was. King Farrick sat at his desk on the side of the small presentation area, looking angry and concerned. The stands were loaded with high ranking soldiers and mages of all kind. In between Veliry and the King stood a cow faced elf wrought in living wood, who glowed a faint green.

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"The five can." The druid assured him. "They draw upon the souls of the ascendants before them. And they channel the collected energy of every druid present save myself and the other messengers. And the energy of the land."

"But that would burn them out." Veliry said in shock. "Their souls will be devoured by that much energy. And the souls of the ascendant."

The druid nodded solemnly. "Already two have fallen." He said grimly. "Shak'Ras the Hardy even entered rampancy. We lost a lot of people."

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She turned to the druid. "Your people know how to create bottomless bags right?" She asked.

He nodded. "Of course."

"Good." She said as she nodded at the king.

"Listen up!" The king commanded. "Gather all Earth arrows. All explosive rune stones. Gather every ounce of cloth you can gather from every tailor, seamstress, sail boat, and wherever the hell else we can get it. And poles." He said as people began looking at each other in confusion. "Iron poles. Steel poles. Wooden poles. I don't care what kind. Grab the damn spears if you have to and break the tips off."

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Entirely new. For him at least.

It had also been ended in a completely unexpected, and significantly more dire, fashion.

And now he had to get back into his room without his mom finding out about any of it.

He figured he had three choices. And none of them were very good.

Option 1: Sneak in like that time he and James had gone out late at night to try to see if one of the local folk tales was true in the junkyard a few blocks away. That hadn't been successful.

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Quietly, and ever so slowly, Joey opened the door to their rooms and readied himself to move in.

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"Morning mom." He said with a forced smile. "That was a great wedding huh?"

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Wait, is this just GATE? (302/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10m1mo1/wait_is_this_just_gate_301/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Mexican moms just know bro.

Enjoy

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When Vickers emerged from Atrafar's room the next day, he did so while suppressing a grin.

His legs hurt.

His back and arms hurt.

His jaw and tongue even hurt a bit, side effects of having his new mouth structure tested (in more ways than one), and he felt more than a little dehydrated.

But as he heard the gentle rumbling snore of the exhausted Outer Light knight slumbering inside, he couldn't help but let the grin show for a few moments as he stretched his back a bit.

Then he saw a mage go running by in a hurry.

He didn't know this one, not by name anyways, but he could hear their heart jack-hammering inside their chest and knew that they were in some kind of excited state.

So he decided to follow them. It was easy in his new form.

Only a few moments later he came across a small squad of the guards who were half running in the same direction.

One of them recognized him.

"Chief Vickers." They greeted. "Someone found and got word to you?"

"Uh. No?" He said hesitantly. He thought the sergeant's name was Rorik or something like that. "Why? What's happening?"

"The blight's acting up again." The man replied. "We're being scrambled to help the druids."

"Druids?" He asked in surprise at the unexpected news. "What? Shit."

He changed his direction and began moving faster even as he noticed that there were more and more castle guards now.

"Where are you going sir?" The Sergeant asked behind him.

"Gearing up." He said. "Be there in a minute."

And he began jogging toward his room.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (301/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10lefrl/wait_is_this_just_gate_300/)

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"High mage!" A voice with an odd timbre called out into the lab. "High Mage Veliry!"

Veliry shot up from where she'd been slumbering, her head pounding from the alcohol she'd drank the night before.

A dull, dark green, light glowed from the tree in the corner of her lab.

"Druid?" She asked groggily as she rose to her feet.

"High mage?" The voice called again. "Are you here? Please answer!"

"I'm here!" She called back, rubbing her eyes as she did. "Not so loud." She begged.

Then, as she felt a bit of wind blow through from an open window somewhere she remembered that she was no longer wearing the green dress she'd been wearing. She quickly grabbed a discarded apron from off of a nearby table and put it on quickly. Then she stepped out of the still open door to her personal quarters and into the lab where the light was coming from.

A face, with the snout of some kind of cow or horse, and the eyes and ears of an elf, protruded from the small berry tree that she kept in the

corner of her lab for both snacks and occasional experiments. It was ringed with the dull green energy that was causing the light.

It turned a bit as she entered the room and grabbed a robe that she quickly threw on over the apron.

"Are you the High Mage?" The semi-bovine man asked as it saw her.

"Arch mage. Yes. What can I do for a woodland druid at... lord knows what hour this is?" She replied as she pulled the robe shut.

"I am with the druidic sphere." It replied, anxiousness in its voice. "We were told by our royal envoys to alert them if anything occurred that we couldn't explain. Namely disappearances of people or large swathes of land and forest."

"Yes." She said as the sudden realization of what he was talking about woke her up a bit more. "The vanishing blight. And the blight possessed."

"Aye miss." He said. "It is here. At the soul grove. It... it.... destroyed an entire path of the forest. We sent our woodlings out to find out what happened. And to fight whatever was doing it. None returned. Now whatever it is is at our walls. The Five fight to hold it at bay as we speak. But whatever it is is formidable. We can all feel their defenses weakening even as we speak."

Her jaw dropped open wider with each sentence. If even the five Beast-borne elders of the druids were being defeated then they didn't have much time.

"Wait here." She said as she stood up. "I have to go tell the king."

"Please hurry." The disembodied face in the tree requested as she rushed out of the room.

The face turned a few moments later as someone else emerged from the room with a blanket wrapped around their waist.

"Ms. Veliry?" Joey asked curiously as he rubbed at his eyes. Then he saw the face in the small tree. "Umm.... Hi?" He said hesitantly.

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Now he was back in his off duty clothes, though not the bright green and blue formal robes he'd worn to the wedding, and standing in front of Atrafar's door. He'd made sure to bathe before coming here, since he was certain that she wouldn't want to smell what he'd smelled once the Muck Marcher had been extricated from the metal suit.

He could hear her moving inside, despite her effort to be silent. He could also smell the faintly cinnamon scented perfume she'd put on while changing from her armor to the loose formal wear she'd put on for the dinner. She was awake, and he thought she was waiting on the other side of the door.

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"You ditched me." She said in a flat tone.

Vickers didn't balk. "Duty called." He replied simply. "An... unexpected development. The King deferred to me so that the Captain wouldn't be pulled from his party and new spouse."

She looked at him, and he could see the one ear in the opening of the door turned his direction, listening to him intently. He knew that she understood duty better than most.

"You could have returned." She said. "The party lasted nearly six hours."

That was fair, in his mind. "I had to see it finished properly. The threat neutralized to a safe enough level. It took time." He nodded. "I'm sorry that I left you hanging."

She nodded back. "I understand." She said as she opened the door. "Come in. Let's not waste the good mood of a fun night."

Vickers looked up and down the hallway. He knew that the elder Choi was not going to be seen likely for a few days, based both on the event, and the fact that he'd already been halfway off his feet even before Vickers had been called away.

He was also fairly certain that the younger of the Chois was going to be in a similar state for an entirely different reason.

But he still didn't want to risk either of them knowing where he was going, as he scanned and sniffed at the hallway around him.

A moment later he stepped into the room, shutting it firmly behind him.

It was time to test out the new hardware.

It took every ounce of will in his mind to resist his new animal instincts and attack her as she almost literally pounced on him.

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Mrs. Choi was just standing up to leave when the King entered the small temple that she'd been kneeling in.

"Lady Choi." He said softly as he took a seat in one of the benches nearby. "I did not expect to run into anyone here. Much less you. Is everything alright?" He asked.

"Yes." She said as she wiped the dust from her dress where she'd been kneeling. She kept the small crucifix tucked into her hand as she did. "I just came to pray a bit."

"You're religious?" He wondered. "Your son doesn't strike me as being so."

"No." She admitted. "No neither of them are. But I was raised catholic. And their father was.... Well." She see-sawed her hand a bit. "Kind of stuck between my family's beliefs and his family's."

The king nodded understanding. "Praying for the new couple?" He asked. "Wealth, health, and happiness?"

She nodded. "In part." She replied. "But also I just wanted to let my husband know how well his son is doing."

The king nodded again. "Then you were doing much the same as I was about to." He said as he looked over at a door with a metal cage over it. In the center of the cage door was a plaque with a crown that didn't look like his, and a bouquet of flowers engraved upon it. "I came to tell Amina's mother how lovely her daughter has grown. And how alike they would find each other." He said with a deep breath that he sighed out afterward.

She didn't know how to respond to that. She hadn't expected to encounter anyone here either.

"In our world." She said after a few moments of awkward silence. "In our world the gods did not exist." She said with a look of concern. "At least... not until this whole... werewolf thing happened. And who knows what any of that means." She thought for a moment. "I don't know if them actually existing, here or there, means anything for those we've lost. I... I don't know much about your pantheon." She shook her head. "In fact. People on Earth have even waged wars over which religion is RIGHT.

I don't know if any of them are. I don't know if a soul really exists. Even if your mages say they do." She shrugged. "Wouldn't change the fact that my husband died on a world where they probably didn't. And in a time before magic had come to it." She looked up at the painting above. It depicted some kind of goddess of light raising an impaled soldier up into her embrace. "I stopped believing years ago." She said. She didn't mention that her husband's death had been the thing that had finally killed that belief.

The whole time she'd spoken the King had simply listened and watched her. He understood the sentiment far too well, even if he DID live in a world where souls and gods were a bit more real. Or at least a bit more tangible anyways.

"Yet you still pray?" He asked. "You still speak to him?"

She shrugged.

"I figure it doesn't hurt anyone." She said. "If I'm wrong, then I'm just one more person screaming into the air. And if I'm right. Then maybe he can hear me. And maybe he can see how strong our sons have become."

"He is a good man." The King agreed. "Both of them are. I don't know much about your husband except what little James has told me. But... I can't imagine a father who wouldn't be proud to have sired him."

She smiled. "I know." She said. "And so does he. We've always known that." She added with a nod toward the painting. She stood up and bowed ever so slightly. "Your wife would be proud too." She said. "Amina is a lovely woman. My son has a good eye."

King Farrick smiled and nodded as she turned to leave.

"Have a good night Lady Choi." He said.

Then he walked over to the door with the cage over it, and pulled a key from around his neck.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10my5qc/wait_is_this_just_gate_302/)

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Vickers looked up and down the hallway. He knew that the elder Choi was not going to be seen likely for a few days, based both on the event, and the fact that he'd already been halfway off his feet even before Vickers had been called away.

He was also fairly certain that the younger of the Chois was going to be in a similar state for an entirely different reason.

But he still didn't want to risk either of them knowing where he was going, as he scanned and sniffed at the hallway around him.

A moment later he stepped into the room, shutting it firmly behind him.

It was time to test out the new hardware.

It took every ounce of will in his mind to resist his new animal instincts and attack her as she almost literally pounced on him.

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Mrs. Choi was just standing up to leave when the King entered the small temple that she'd been kneeling in.

"Lady Choi." He said softly as he took a seat in one of the benches nearby. "I did not expect to run into anyone here. Much less you. Is everything alright?" He asked.

"Yes." She said as she wiped the dust from her dress where she'd been kneeling. She kept the small crucifix tucked into her hand as she did. "I just came to pray a bit."

"You're religious?" He wondered. "Your son doesn't strike me as being so."

"No." She admitted. "No neither of them are. But I was raised catholic. And their father was.... Well." She see-sawed her hand a bit. "Kind of stuck between my family's beliefs and his family's."

The king nodded understanding. "Praying for the new couple?" He asked. "Wealth, health, and happiness?"

She nodded. "In part." She replied. "But also I just wanted to let my husband know how well his son is doing."

The king nodded again. "Then you were doing much the same as I was about to." He said as he looked over at a door with a metal cage over it. In the center of the cage door was a plaque with a crown that didn't look like his, and a bouquet of flowers engraved upon it. "I came to tell Amina's mother how lovely her daughter has grown. And how alike they would find each other." He said with a deep breath that he sighed out afterward.

She didn't know how to respond to that. She hadn't expected to encounter anyone here either.

"In our world." She said after a few moments of awkward silence. "In our world the gods did not exist." She said with a look of concern. "At least... not until this whole... werewolf thing happened. And who knows what any of that means." She thought for a moment. "I don't know if them actually existing, here or there, means anything for those we've lost. I... I don't know much about your pantheon." She shook her head. "In fact. People on Earth have even waged wars over which religion is RIGHT. I don't know if any of them are. I don't know if a soul really exists. Even if your mages say they do." She shrugged. "Wouldn't change the fact that my husband died on a world where they probably didn't. And in a time before magic had come to it." She looked up at the painting above. It depicted some kind of goddess of light raising an impaled soldier up into her embrace. "I stopped believing years ago." She said. She didn't mention that her husband's death had been the thing that had finally killed that belief.

The whole time she'd spoken the King had simply listened and watched her. He understood the sentiment far too well, even if he DID live in a world where souls and gods were a bit more real. Or at least a bit more tangible anyways.

"Yet you still pray?" He asked. "You still speak to him?"

She shrugged.

"I figure it doesn't hurt anyone." She said. "If I'm wrong, then I'm just one more person screaming into the air. And if I'm right. Then maybe he can hear me. And maybe he can see how strong our sons have become."

"He is a good man." The King agreed. "Both of them are. I don't know much about your husband except what little James has told me. But... I can't imagine a father who wouldn't be proud to have sired him."

She smiled. "I know." She said. "And so does he. We've always known that." She added with a nod toward the painting. She stood up and bowed

ever so slightly. "Your wife would be proud too." She said. "Amina is a lovely woman. My son has a good eye."

King Farrick smiled and nodded as she turned to leave.

"Have a good night Lady Choi." He said.

Then he walked over to the door with the cage over it, and pulled a key from around his neck.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10my46e/wait_is_this_just_gate_302/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (300/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10h9u01/wait_is_this_just_gate_299/)

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The two of them moved among the tables together and greeted people from all over the world. Amina spent most of that time introducing people to James that he had never met before, and of more than a few species that James hadn't seen even here in the capital. But James's affable nature and ability to roll with punches allowed him to take part in the conversations easily. The latter proved especially necessary with some of the dwarves and orcs they spoke with, especially Kraug, who James thought might have been crying recently.

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stop basis as they stopped at each table. James's with ale, and Amina's with wine.

Eventually, when greetings were had, and scuffles were settled, and just as both James and Amina's stomachs were beginning to rumble for food, the newlywed couple was able to relax in a pair of comfortable chairs at the main table. Even the King's seat was moved off-center in favor of honoring them.

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He wasn't oblivious to the countless spears, swords, axes, bows and crossbows, and even rifles of a crude sort, that were currently aimed at him.

His helmet lay on the ground in front of him, having been ejected using his emergency access command only a few minutes earlier.

Clamped in his one hand, unconscious only because he'd allowed it, was the person.... or thing... that he'd formerly known as Brick. And trailing behind him on a long rope that was hooked to one of the numerous recovery hooks on his suit, were five more people, also unconscious. Or at least they had been when he'd left the wreckage of the tavern behind.

He now suspected that he'd never known who the.... person... in his hand was. He hadn't known anything. They hadn't let him.

They'd done something to his mind, and to his ability to interface with his suit. Something using magic. And he didn't know what, or how to counter it moving forward.

But he HAD known something was wrong. And however they'd gone about messing with him, they hadn't done it completely enough to stop him from finding it.

It had taken the better part of two days. But eventually he'd been capable of pulling up the "Phantom Files" as he'd come to think of them. A bit of fancy reprogramming of his helmet feed, and a broken mirror that he'd sneakily placed a shard of INSIDE his helmet, and he'd finally been able to see the footage that the Agency had been trying to keep him from watching.

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There had been a moment of shock on her face as she'd seen the pistol raising up to aim at her.

He hadn't given her enough time to change that expression.

And after that, the small subterranean complex under the tavern had exploded into violence of a kind that he'd never experienced before. His

battle in the desert had been his first look at what real combat magic was like. And that was what this had been.

Only it hadn't occurred out in the wide open air like the desert. It had gone down in musty, dark, cramped, tunnels.

Add a bit of water and it would have been the exact kind of setting he was, almost literally, made for.

And now here he was, only an hour or so after that had started. Five prisoners behind him unconscious on a rope, and one on the edge of death under the grip of his robotic hand.

He coughed, and the soldiers flinched nervously, as he spat blood out onto the ground in front of him.

He didn't think he had a lot of time left in this world or any other. It didn't help that there was a three foot long section of spear sticking out of what would have been his stomach in his old body. His shit-can was compromised, he knew that much. And that was a death sentence for any of his kind.

He wished they had been dumb enough to have given him his rifle.

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As if hearing his complaint, the door suddenly opened and King Farrick, who he recognized from recordings, came jogging out with a large armored elf and a..... well, Driscoll didn't know what the other person was. They looked like one of the Thundercats had donned a bunch of Military camo and carried a CT6.5.

Then he saw the insignia on the chest of the, stretched to its limits, plate carrier. The anchor, eagle, trident, and pistol.

"Chief Vickers?" He wondered.

"Driscoll." The man growled as he skidded to a halt and held his rifle at the ready. The large elf did much the same with a shield and halberd next to him.

"What is the meaning of this?" The King bellowed from behind them.

"This is the Muck Marcher that escaped with the Agency during the desert battle." Vickers informed him.

So they knew what had happened to him. Driscoll realized. He began wondering about whether or not they'd sent anyone looking for him. And how that might have gone if they had.

"Through...." He wheezed. "No fault of my own." He finished. Then he pulled Brick (or whoever he actually was) up and dropped his limp, unconscious, body in front of him. "Bee Tee Dubs." He said with a wheezing chuckle. "Here's some of your.... boogeymen." Then he reached back and grabbed the rope. With a quick tug he snapped it and held its end out to the side.

"What do you mean?" Vickers demanded. "Who are these people?"

Driscoll, in a now herculean effort, raised his head up to look at the newly feline SEAL.

"They messed with me." He said, tapping his finger painfully on his temple. "With my head. Made me.... see things different. Made me think.... they were on my side." He reached down and grabbed the helmet off of the ground and looked at the front of it. There was a metal spike protruding from its face plate, a remnant of some kind of club that had been smashed into it. "Couldn't change the video logs so they just changed the way I saw them." The servos in his hand whined loudly before the helmet started to crunch under its pressure. "Couldn't stop me though."

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"No. But He probably will be soon. We need to get him to the toolies." Vickers said.

"And the others?" King Farrick wondered. "He said they're members of the Agency."

"If that's the case sir." Ira'Nyl chimed in. "We need to get them in custody, and magically constrained immediately."

"They came from a tavern about half a mile from here." One of the soldiers said. "We've already dispatched men to investigate."

"Good." She replied. "See if those ones are alive. If they are bind them. Get them into the caster cells. And get them healers." The men present jumped to follow the commands.

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James and Amina stumbled into their shared room hours later after having been carried there by a large assortment of people from the party. They'd practically been launched through the door and James had to do everything in his power not to literally fall on top of Amina.

And then, as they recovered their wits from the drunken maelstrom of the crowd surfing trip to their room, James DID fall on top of her. Though this time was intentional.

Her back arched up as his hand snaked beneath it and pulled her up so that her face met his.

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He pulled back suddenly, looking mildly curious.

"Is that my actual title?" He asked.

She giggled a bit. "Well you're not ACTUAL royalty." She replied as she relaxed a bit. Though her legs were now wrapped around his waist. "You're just married INTO the family."

He considered it for a moment. "Prince consort." He said in his mockingly posh British accent. Then he lowered back down. "Prince.... Consort." He said softly, causing more giggles which he interrupted with a deep kiss.

They could still hear party-goers making merry outside their shut door.

Amina tugged at the blue rope holding James's hanbok in place even as he quickly undid the leather straps that kept her gilded armor chest plate on.

Neither of them let the commotion outside stop them from enjoying what came next.

For them, only the person in front of them existed.

And a mischievously defiant god looked on with a wry smile at the mating couple, before reaching down to touch the two souls for just the briefest of moments. One they, as mortals, wouldn't even perceive as having happened.

Then, duty done, they blinked back over to that other, most interesting, universe that they called home.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10m1o0n/wait_is_this_just_gate_301/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (300/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10h9ro7/wait_is_this_just_gate_299/) /
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He considered it for a moment. "Prince consort." He said in his mockingly posh British accent. Then he lowered back down. "Prince.... Consort." He said softly, causing more giggles which he interrupted with a deep kiss.

They could still hear party-goers making merry outside their shut door.

Amina tugged at the blue rope holding James's hanbok in place even as he quickly undid the leather straps that kept her gilded armor chest plate on.

Neither of them let the commotion outside stop them from enjoying what came next.

For them, only the person in front of them existed.

And a mischievously defiant god looked on with a wry smile at the mating couple, before reaching down to touch the two souls for just the briefest of moments. One they, as mortals, wouldn't even perceive as having happened.

Then, duty done, they blinked back over to that other, most interesting, universe that they called home.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10m1mo1/wait_is_this_just_gate_301/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (299/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10gh783/wait_is_this_just_gate_298/)

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Enjoy.

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When Mrs. Choi walked into the grand hall and saw her youngest son standing near the dais she gasped in shock at the hanbok that Joey was wearing. She'd known ahead of time that the two brothers had worked together to keep their wedding outfits a surprise, mainly on her behalf, but the sight of the black and blue outfit still managed to startle her to tears. She hugged Joey for a minute before moving up a step to her place of honor on a chair only marginally smaller than the King's.

Two empty seats sat next to each of them. For the spouses, and parents of the people getting married, that they each had lost.

A few minutes later, and to the sound of horns, James walked in in his own hanbok. He smiled wide and proud when he saw her in her seat and did what he could not to rush his way up to the platform and hug her. But he had a ceremony to perform.

James stepped up to the bottom step of the dais.

In one swift motion James drew his sword from its sheath and pointed it at the King. Several of the guards around the room flinched reflexively as he did before remembering that it was a show and nothing more. Ironically, that was also an expected part of the ceremony. He also drew his pistol from its holster and held it at his side.

"King Farrick Petravius!" He announced. "I have spent the allotted time in courtship with your eldest daughter. In that time I have given my life, and every ounce of my love to her. And I have found no reason to stop doing so." He dropped the two weapons to the ground with a loud clatter. "On my life. Will you allow me to marry her on this day?"

Then he dropped to a knee, held his arms out to the side and lowered his head into a bow.

King Farrick stood up and drew the long narrow sword at his own hip and touched the tip of it to the back of James's neck. If the king desired, the position would allow him to kill James with only a pound or so of pressure, a flick of his wrist.

The two of them stayed that way for several long seconds as the crowd watched. Then the King sheathed the sword in a motion as fluid as the draw had been.

"I have seen this love, and this life, Captain Choi." He said in his booming voice. "And you may."

James stood up, doing everything he could to hide the fact that his legs were shaking, and nodded to the King. King Farrick returned the nod with a small smile. Then James moved to the side of the platform near his mom and brother.

The horns sounded again and everyone present turned to the door.

Amina stepped through the door, and James felt his heart jump in his chest.

She wore a gilded version of her normal breastplate. But that was the only armor she wore. The rest was flowing golden silk with red and blue embroidery. In her hair was a ring of the yellowish white flowers that grew in vines on the balcony near their room. He knew that they smelled of lavender and citrus.

On one of her arms was the magical blue shield that had kept her alive ever since the two of them had become betrothed to each other.

And in the other hand was a large, double edged battle axe that James recognized immediately, though he hadn't seen anyone carry it since Kela had died.

James was reminded of an image he'd seen years before in a history class about ancient Norse culture, and the Valkyries that they had worshiped.

He did what he could to keep his jaw from dropping. He'd yet to see her wedding outfit.

She stopped at the foot of the platform, just as he had and slowly lowered herself into the same kneel as she placed her weapons at her feet.

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Mrs. Choi didn't have a sword, and when offered one had declined it. Instead she dropped down a bit and lifted Amina's head with her hand.

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"It is the way of Captain Choi's world for the two being married to say a short speech defining their love for each other." The King said. "And after speaking it over with each other, my daughter has offered to forgo hers in favor of Captain Choi's."

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The murmuring from those in attendance rose at the mention of the premarital violence.

"And... as much as my jaw hurt. That pain's nothing compared to the pain I'd feel without you now." He continued, his voice quavering a bit. "We have lived together for over a year now. Traveled. Fought. Bled." He looked down at the weapons they'd discarded, especially the axe. "Lost people." He said. He reached up and wiped the single tear that had rolled down her cheek. "But we've done it together..... I have gone through some of the worst days of my life since arriving in this world. And each time you've been the one that let me get through it. You've seen me at my lowest. And helped drive me to new heights I couldn't even have imagined before now. My life is better with you in it. And I'm so happy that we get to bind our lives together like this. I never want to go back to the life before I met you."

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The crowd laughed even as Amina smiled.

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Marcos began chanting, and a ring of blue light formed around them.

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James felt the magical compulsion to speak the truth.

"I do." He said calmly. "More than I've ever loved another."

"Will you safeguard her life and livelihood for the rest of your life?"

"I will." He said.

"Amina Petravius. Princess of Petravus. Do you love James Choi?" The King asked.

"With my entire heart." She said with a squeeze of James's hand. He squeezed back.

"And do you intend to safeguard his life and livelihood for the rest of your life?"

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The ring of magical light lowered until it was level with their chests. Then it moved in until it was inside of them, glowing inside of their abdomens.

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Amina had known about the rings. But she hadn't known about what they were made of. She looked at James in surprise as he slid the ring onto her finger.

"Yeah." He said softly, so that only she would hear him. Then she took her turn putting his ring on his hand.

"And the last of the Earth rituals is this." The King said as the two of them looked at each other again.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10lefrl/wait_is_this_just_gate_300/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (299/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10ggt98/wait_is_this_just_gate_298/) /
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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10ledvv/wait_is_this_just_gate_300/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (298/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10fltus/wait_is_this_just_gate_297/)

Writer's note: Vickers: Deadly operative. Newly transformed were-guar. Startlingly skilled banjo player. And most importantly.... master of *~~seduction~~* *AWKWARDNESS... he's the master of awkwardness.*

Enjoy.

\~

James spent the first thirty minutes of flight simply marveling at the sights he was seeing.

Sure, he'd flown over the capital numerous times since he'd learned how. But those had all been slightly taxing because HE had been the one

flying. Plus his method of flight typically resulted in him not having much time to enjoy the views. Aaaaand it didn't help much that for a lot of those flights he was headed somewhere to handle an emergency.

The trip that he and Amina took on her sister's flying ship however, was more akin to being on a day cruise on some kind of sailboat.

It had taken a few days for the ships crew to give it a once over after it had arrived. Its trip to the capital had been only its seventh time flying, and easily the longest trip it had ever taken, and they'd needed to make sure that it was working.

Now it floated lazily, and with a slight up and down bob, over the farmland near the capital's north eastern borders.

James and Amina stood on the prow of the ship, hands on each others waist as they took in the view. Alixan lounged next to a table that was a few feet smaller than him playing some kind of chess game with one of the ship's crew members. And Xarina and a few of her "ACTUAL SAILORS" as she'd loudly called them, were meticulously going over every inch of the ship with a fine toothed comb as they inspected it.

James liked Princess Ferria, who stood a few yards away with her eyes closed as she enjoyed the wind. She was the one sibling out of the royal family who had, at least so far, not started some kind of fight with him. The fact that she looked like a slightly shorter, lighter haired version of Amina, albeit not as battle hardened, only helped.

But she also made him feel as though he should keep her at arms length.

Something about her unsettled him.

He wasn't sure if it was her seemingly TOO friendly ambassador husband. Or if it was the fact that she was extremely religious. Even now she looked as though she was on the verge of breaking into prayer. But something about her just set off the little voice in his head that said she was trouble.

Maybe, he thought, it was just his brain being intelligent for a change and telling him that she was a little TOO similar to Amina, and that that in and of itself was a danger to him.

Either way he had resolved very quickly to keep his guard up around her.

"We should ask Ferria if she'll let us ride this for our first few post marriage visitations." Amina said as she leaned into his shoulder and rested her head on top of his. "It'll make the trip much easier. Then we can just travel by conventional means for the rest of them."

James bristled at that. He peered over at the serene sister nearby for a moment, then over at the Ambassador, who was standing next to the ship's captain beaming as he answered Xarina's borderline interrogation.

"Oh. I don't know." He replied as he planted a kiss on Amina's cheek. "I kinda like traveling on the road with you." He said. "Besides. I need to spend more time with Steve. Feel like I haven't taken him for a nice long ride in months."

"That's because you haven't." She shot back. "But this ship's big enough for him."

"Yeah." He agreed. "But also, look at my track record with trips." He reminded her. "What happens if the Agency or some other asshole decides to mess with us again and we're up in this thing? Even the Ambassador admitted that this thing isn't fit for actual battle."

Amina grumbled. The General in her being uncomfortable with the reminder that they were currently in a very indefensible position.

"Hmmmm. Fair." She admitted. "Still. We could at least ride it out to the eastern sea. Save us a few weeks."

James conceded the point. They had already made that trip a few times before. And he couldn't deny how incredible this ship was.

"Fine." He said. Then he grinned devilishly. "But we're christening this ship the first chance we get. I have a feeling that the priest and priestess have neglected that particular duty." He said with a nod toward her sister.

"Christening?" She asked curiously.

James whispered in her ear and Amina had to fight not to blush and join him with a grin of her own.

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"So. The Army wasn't exactly happy about the interview." Fletcher said as he joined Samantha and Dr. Munro at their lunch table. "But they admitted that none of the information in it was classified. Most of what happened is on camera in one form or another, and the president already admitted that it was real. So they backed off."

Samantha fidgeted a bit as the lawyer finished sitting down and rolled up the sleeves of his flannel shirt above his elbows. This was one of the first days she'd ever left her room WITHOUT her hoodie. It was one of the next steps toward being able to live normally again, relatively speaking. Instead she wore a long navy style peacoat. It still obscured her body enough to let her relax a bit. But there was no hood to hide behind. And even as large as it would have been on a human, it only barely reached past her waist.

"But it was a good interview." He said as he blew on a spoonful of chili from his bowl. "They sent me the final edit for review. It's well done."

"That's good." Dr. Munro said with a smile. "Did they add the last bit?"

Fletcher nodded as he savored the food for a moment. "Mmhmm. Yep."

"Last part?" Samantha asked. She didn't actually know much about the video other than that she would be in it and it would be played on the news in a few days.

"An announcement to anyone else who might have been.... affected... in the same way you were." Dr. Munro said with a hand on Samantha's shoulder. "But who didn't join with the two packs that split off and escaped from the military."

"They got the southern one." Fletcher said before wiping his mouth with a napkin. "Caught them just north of Amarillo. They tried to take on one of the shanty militias. The commotion brought them a bit too much attention and the Military caught up to em."

"That's terrible." Dr. Munro said in shock.

Samantha squirmed a bit. She still didn't know how she felt about the fact that there were other werewolves out there. Hell, she'd still yet to meet any of the others that were supposedly here in THIS very hospital. Though she had smelled traces of them a handful of times. She thought there were maybe four.

"What was the announcement?" She asked, still wondering about the video.

"A statement of sanctuary." Dr. Munro replied. Samantha looked at her curiously. Dr. Munro shrugged. "We're currently the only hospital in the country that's currently working on helping werewolves adjust to their new lives and attempting to find a cure." She said. "At least as far as we know. Who knows what your former employers have going on."

"You want them to come here?" She asked.

"Well. Not necessarily HERE." Fletcher weighed in. "But we've uh... set up a bit of a network of hospitals and clinics that would be willing to work with us."

"What?" She wondered. "Like an underground railroad for werewolves?"

Fletcher looked visibly uncomfortable. "I..... wouldn't equate the two." He said uncertainly. "More like an offer of safe harbor."

"Can you do that?" She asked.

Fletcher just shrugged as he crushed some cheese crackers into his bowl. "No idea. There's no laws pertaining to the treatment of werewolves just yet."

She thought about the statement for a moment. She'd never thought about what HER own legal status was. She also did everything in her power NOT to look at the lawyer's arms as he smashed the little crackers between them.

"Well. I hope they answer it." She said. "It would suck to deal with what I'm dealing with alone."

Dr. Munro just smiled as she sipped her tea.

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"So..." Vickers began as the tailor measured him. "How does this work with the tail and the monthly transformation?"

Nearby Atrafar was inspecting a set of some kind of light blue silky material.

"Easily enough." The tailor said as he measured Vickers' bicep. "Twenty two." He said to his assistant, who quickly noted the number. "For this first month we'll have you come back a few more times. Once at full were-form. Once at your mostly human form. Plus twice in between. Once at the halfway point, and once at the other quarter way."

"Okay." Vickers said, seeing where this was going. "Measurements at each. And I'm guessing a wide array of fits for each."

The tailor nodded as he pulled a pin from the corner of his mouth and used it to hold some cloth in place. "Plus some stuff that we calculate to fit the spaces in between." He paused as he adjusted the cloth a bit and repositioned the pin. "Given enough time you'll learn how your transformations USUALLY go. And you'll be able to swap what you wear around to fit you best. Same with any armor or weapons you like to use. Though, that's a blacksmith's problem, not mine. How's that feel? Move your arm up like you're waving."

Vickers did as told. "Kind of rubs a bit just under the back of the armpit." He said. The tailor nodded and readjusted. "And the tail?" He asked again. It had been bugging him a bit to feel wind on his ass while wearing the robes that the Lunar Council had provided.

"What about it?" The tailor asked. "Not much you can do with it except leave an opening or cut it off."

"I do not recommend the latter." Atrafar chimed in.

Vickers turned to look at her and was surprised to see her being wrapped up in some of the blue cloth she'd been inspecting. The tailor, who had four arms, with her was measuring the amount even as she helped apply it to the werewolf's body.

"It's true." His tailor chimed in. "I've known a few of the folk who have opted to rid themselves of their tails. It's doable. But they all ended up regretting it."

"Really?" He asked, more curious than anything. He had no intention of cutting parts of himself off.

"Throws off the balance." Atrafar replied. "Especially for feline types. Plus leaves a hell of a deformity when you transition back to your more human form."

"I can sew a flap for you." His tailor said. "Make it overlap the base of your tail a bit more than normal. It'll be uncomfortable if your tail raises for any reason. But that'll be a minor inconvenience."

"Lots of people ask for that?" He wondered. The tailor simply grunted. Then Vickers jolted as his tail was grabbed by the man and measured.

"Get used to that." The man said. "Especially around children."

Vickers was about to reply when Atrafar spoke.

"What do you think?" She asked.

Vickers turned to look at her and his eyebrows rose even as his mouth dropped open just a tiny bit.

Atrafar was wearing the blue cloth, which actually faded to a dark green in some places, in a style that reminded him of Old India back on Earth. The cloth was simply bundled around her chest and then draped over her shoulders in a simple wrap. It turned into a simple dress as it passed her waist and wrapped around her.

"Woah." He said without realizing it, and Atrafar smiled awkwardly.

The Tailor chuckled quietly.

"So. Wedding's in two days?" The man asked as he noted the length of Vickers' legs. "Same day as the royal wedding?"

"Hmm?" Vickers wondered as he looked down, broken out of his thoughts by the question.

"You two make a handsome couple. And big. Litter should be strong." The tailor mused.

"Oh." Vickers said as he realized the man's meaning. "No. We're not..." He gulped as the tailor looked up at him questioningly. Then he looked over at Atrafar, who made a point of looking away as she resisted smiling.

"Relax." Said the tailor after a moment. "I recognize the robes of a member of the Outer Light. She's never getting married. And you still have a body to get used to. Highly doubt you'd be going through a wedding ceremony all clumsy like you are."

"Besides." Atrafar said. "I'm only here for a bit of shopping. I'll be wearing my armor as an escort to Elder Tadrias during the wedding."

"You're not going with me?" Vickers asked.

"Are you ACTUALLY asking me to?" She shot back.

"I mean. I kinda thought th-" He tried to reply.

"Because last time I checked, Royal weddings require invitation." She said, ignoring him.

The tailor made a point of remaining dead silent as he gingerly continued his measurements.

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He looked dead at her as his eyes darkened with determination.

"Atrafar. When your duties as a knight or whatever are over. Will you attend the remainder of the wedding with me?" He asked in a monotone. Then he added in a much quieter voice, one that he hoped only she would be able to hear. ^("Also, I don't know how to dance in this body yet.")

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He simply stared back at her.

The two of them stared at each other for several seconds that Vickers thought probably felt longer for him than they did for her.

"Yes. I'll go with you." She said finally, and he took a breath that he hadn't even realized he'd been holding.

Then she turned and walked away with the tailor that had been attending to her.

A few moments later Vickers' tailor spoke up.

"I don't know if you two are ACTUALLY a couple." He said as he held a swathe of cloth up to the side of Vickers' thigh. "But if you are; you're sleeping in the guest room tonight."

Vickers was starting to wonder about that first part too.

"Her quarters at the castle are nicer than mine." He said instead. "Her guest room is nicer than my entire room."

"Ah." The tailor said. "Upgrades then."

Vickers looked at his newly triangular ears in the mirror for a moment.

"All over the place." He said simply.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10h9u01/wait_is_this_just_gate_299/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (298/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10fls58/wait_is_this_just_gate_297/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Vickers: Deadly operative. Newly transformed were-guar. Startlingly skilled banjo player. And most importantly.... master of *~~seduction~~* *AWKWARDNESS... he's the master of awkwardness.*

Enjoy.

\~

James spent the first thirty minutes of flight simply marveling at the sights he was seeing.

Sure, he'd flown over the capital numerous times since he'd learned how. But those had all been slightly taxing because HE had been the one flying. Plus his method of flight typically resulted in him not having much time to enjoy the views. Aaaaand it didn't help much that for a lot of those flights he was headed somewhere to handle an emergency.

The trip that he and Amina took on her sister's flying ship however, was more akin to being on a day cruise on some kind of sailboat.

It had taken a few days for the ships crew to give it a once over after it had arrived. Its trip to the capital had been only its seventh time flying, and easily the longest trip it had ever taken, and they'd needed to make sure that it was working.

Now it floated lazily, and with a slight up and down bob, over the farmland near the capital's north eastern borders.

James and Amina stood on the prow of the ship, hands on each others waist as they took in the view. Alixan lounged next to a table that was a few feet smaller than him playing some kind of chess game with one of the ship's crew members. And Xarina and a few of her "ACTUAL SAILORS" as she'd loudly called them, were meticulously going over every inch of the ship with a fine toothed comb as they inspected it.

James liked Princess Ferria, who stood a few yards away with her eyes closed as she enjoyed the wind. She was the one sibling out of the royal family who had, at least so far, not started some kind of fight with him. The fact that she looked like a slightly shorter, lighter haired version of Amina, albeit not as battle hardened, only helped.

But she also made him feel as though he should keep her at arms length.

Something about her unsettled him.

He wasn't sure if it was her seemingly TOO friendly ambassador husband. Or if it was the fact that she was extremely religious. Even now she looked as though she was on the verge of breaking into prayer. But something about her just set off the little voice in his head that said she was trouble.

Maybe, he thought, it was just his brain being intelligent for a change and telling him that she was a little TOO similar to Amina, and that that in and of itself was a danger to him.

Either way he had resolved very quickly to keep his guard up around her.

"We should ask Ferria if she'll let us ride this for our first few post marriage visitations." Amina said as she leaned into his shoulder and rested her head on top of his. "It'll make the trip much easier. Then we can just travel by conventional means for the rest of them."

James bristled at that. He peered over at the serene sister nearby for a moment, then over at the Ambassador, who was standing next to the ship's captain beaming as he answered Xarina's borderline interrogation.

"Oh. I don't know." He replied as he planted a kiss on Amina's cheek. "I kinda like traveling on the road with you." He said. "Besides. I need to spend more time with Steve. Feel like I haven't taken him for a nice long ride in months."

"That's because you haven't." She shot back. "But this ship's big enough for him."

"Yeah." He agreed. "But also, look at my track record with trips." He reminded her. "What happens if the Agency or some other asshole decides to mess with us again and we're up in this thing? Even the Ambassador admitted that this thing isn't fit for actual battle."

Amina grumbled. The General in her being uncomfortable with the reminder that they were currently in a very indefensible position.

"Hmmmm. Fair." She admitted. "Still. We could at least ride it out to the eastern sea. Save us a few weeks."

James conceded the point. They had already made that trip a few times before. And he couldn't deny how incredible this ship was.

"Fine." He said. Then he grinned devilishly. "But we're christening this ship the first chance we get. I have a feeling that the priest and priestess have neglected that particular duty." He said with a nod toward her sister.

"Christening?" She asked curiously.

James whispered in her ear and Amina had to fight not to blush and join him with a grin of her own.

\----------

"So. The Army wasn't exactly happy about the interview." Fletcher said as he joined Samantha and Dr. Munro at their lunch table. "But they admitted that none of the information in it was classified. Most of what happened is on camera in one form or another, and the president already admitted that it was real. So they backed off."

Samantha fidgeted a bit as the lawyer finished sitting down and rolled up the sleeves of his flannel shirt above his elbows. This was one of the first days she'd ever left her room WITHOUT her hoodie. It was one of the next steps toward being able to live normally again, relatively speaking. Instead she wore a long navy style peacoat. It still obscured her body enough to let her relax a bit. But there was no hood to hide behind. And even as large as it would have been on a human, it only barely reached past her waist.

"But it was a good interview." He said as he blew on a spoonful of chili from his bowl. "They sent me the final edit for review. It's well done."

"That's good." Dr. Munro said with a smile. "Did they add the last bit?"

Fletcher nodded as he savored the food for a moment. "Mmhmm. Yep."

"Last part?" Samantha asked. She didn't actually know much about the video other than that she would be in it and it would be played on the news in a few days.

"An announcement to anyone else who might have been.... affected... in the same way you were." Dr. Munro said with a hand on Samantha's shoulder. "But who didn't join with the two packs that split off and escaped from the military."

"They got the southern one." Fletcher said before wiping his mouth with a napkin. "Caught them just north of Amarillo. They tried to take on one of the shanty militias. The commotion brought them a bit too much attention and the Military caught up to em."

"That's terrible." Dr. Munro said in shock.

Samantha squirmed a bit. She still didn't know how she felt about the fact that there were other werewolves out there. Hell, she'd still yet to meet any of the others that were supposedly here in THIS very hospital. Though she had smelled traces of them a handful of times. She thought there were maybe four.

"What was the announcement?" She asked, still wondering about the video.

"A statement of sanctuary." Dr. Munro replied. Samantha looked at her curiously. Dr. Munro shrugged. "We're currently the only hospital in the country that's currently working on helping werewolves adjust to their new lives and attempting to find a cure." She said. "At least as far as we know. Who knows what your former employers have going on."

"You want them to come here?" She asked.

"Well. Not necessarily HERE." Fletcher weighed in. "But we've uh... set up a bit of a network of hospitals and clinics that would be willing to work with us."

"What?" She wondered. "Like an underground railroad for werewolves?"

Fletcher looked visibly uncomfortable. "I..... wouldn't equate the two." He said uncertainly. "More like an offer of safe harbor."

"Can you do that?" She asked.

Fletcher just shrugged as he crushed some cheese crackers into his bowl. "No idea. There's no laws pertaining to the treatment of werewolves just yet."

She thought about the statement for a moment. She'd never thought about what HER own legal status was. She also did everything in her power NOT to look at the lawyer's arms as he smashed the little crackers between them.

"Well. I hope they answer it." She said. "It would suck to deal with what I'm dealing with alone."

Dr. Munro just smiled as she sipped her tea.

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"So..." Vickers began as the tailor measured him. "How does this work with the tail and the monthly transformation?"

Nearby Atrafar was inspecting a set of some kind of light blue silky material.

"Easily enough." The tailor said as he measured Vickers' bicep. "Twenty two." He said to his assistant, who quickly noted the number. "For this first month we'll have you come back a few more times. Once at full were-form. Once at your mostly human form. Plus twice in between. Once at the halfway point, and once at the other quarter way."

"Okay." Vickers said, seeing where this was going. "Measurements at each. And I'm guessing a wide array of fits for each."

The tailor nodded as he pulled a pin from the corner of his mouth and used it to hold some cloth in place. "Plus some stuff that we calculate to fit the spaces in between." He paused as he adjusted the cloth a bit and repositioned the pin. "Given enough time you'll learn how your transformations USUALLY go. And you'll be able to swap what you wear around to fit you best. Same with any armor or weapons you like to use. Though, that's a blacksmith's problem, not mine. How's that feel? Move your arm up like you're waving."

Vickers did as told. "Kind of rubs a bit just under the back of the armpit." He said. The tailor nodded and readjusted. "And the tail?" He

asked again. It had been bugging him a bit to feel wind on his ass while wearing the robes that the Lunar Council had provided.

"What about it?" The tailor asked. "Not much you can do with it except leave an opening or cut it off."

"I do not recommend the latter." Atrafar chimed in.

Vickers turned to look at her and was surprised to see her being wrapped up in some of the blue cloth she'd been inspecting. The tailor, who had four arms, with her was measuring the amount even as she helped apply it to the werewolf's body.

"It's true." His tailor chimed in. "I've known a few of the folk who have opted to rid themselves of their tails. It's doable. But they all ended up regretting it."

"Really?" He asked, more curious than anything. He had no intention of cutting parts of himself off.

"Throws off the balance." Atrafar replied. "Especially for feline types. Plus leaves a hell of a deformity when you transition back to your more human form."

"I can sew a flap for you." His tailor said. "Make it overlap the base of your tail a bit more than normal. It'll be uncomfortable if your tail raises for any reason. But that'll be a minor inconvenience."

"Lots of people ask for that?" He wondered. The tailor simply grunted. Then Vickers jolted as his tail was grabbed by the man and measured.

"Get used to that." The man said. "Especially around children."

Vickers was about to reply when Atrafar spoke.

"What do you think?" She asked.

Vickers turned to look at her and his eyebrows rose even as his mouth dropped open just a tiny bit.

Atrafar was wearing the blue cloth, which actually faded to a dark green in some places, in a style that reminded him of Old India back on Earth. The cloth was simply bundled around her chest and then draped over her shoulders in a simple wrap. It turned into a simple dress as it passed her waist and wrapped around her.

"Woah." He said without realizing it, and Atrafar smiled awkwardly.

The Tailor chuckled quietly.

"So. Wedding's in two days?" The man asked as he noted the length of Vickers' legs. "Same day as the royal wedding?"

"Hmm?" Vickers wondered as he looked down, broken out of his thoughts by the question.

"You two make a handsome couple. And big. Litter should be strong." The tailor mused.

"Oh." Vickers said as he realized the man's meaning. "No. We're not..." He gulped as the tailor looked up at him questioningly. Then he looked over at Atrafar, who made a point of looking away as she resisted smiling.

"Relax." Said the tailor after a moment. "I recognize the robes of a member of the Outer Light. She's never getting married. And you still have a body to get used to. Highly doubt you'd be going through a wedding ceremony all clumsy like you are."

"Besides." Atrafar said. "I'm only here for a bit of shopping. I'll be wearing my armor as an escort to Elder Tadrias during the wedding."

"You're not going with me?" Vickers asked.

"Are you ACTUALLY asking me to?" She shot back.

"I mean. I kinda thought th-" He tried to reply.

"Because last time I checked, Royal weddings require invitation." She said, ignoring him.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10h9ro7/wait_is_this_just_gate_299/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (297/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10el0wv/wait_is_this_just_gate_296/)

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Enjoy.

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"Can you state your full name, for the camera?" The young woman says as she sits down in the small chair across the table.

Samantha nods as she struggles to resist the urge to pull her hood back up and over her face. But this is part of the healing. She's learned to look in a mirror again. Now she has to learn how to handle being SEEN again. By other people.

Plus this will get her story out there.

"Yes. Um.... Corporal Samantha Leray Jenkins." She says to the camera. Then she sees her reflection on its lens and has a moment of doubt, flinching back just a bit.

But Doctor Munro is behind it with Mr. Fletcher, the hospital lawyer, right next to her. The doctor gives her a "go ahead" signal with her hand.

"We can edit this." The young woman assures her. "Take your time. We've got all day."

"It's fine." She replies, even if she doesn't believe it. "Let's just... Let's get it over with."

The woman looks at her, and Samantha can't help but smell the makeup she has caked on for the camera.

"So. Corporal Jenkins. You are, at least until a better name is figured out, a werewolf. And also one of the people that survived the violence that occurred here in Sturgis three months ago. Tell us what happened."

Samantha looked back past the camera and saw both the doctor and Mr. Fletcher watching her. Fletcher nodded just a bit with a small smile.

"Well." She begins. "I'm legally not allowed to tell you too much about what occurred inside the base. Um... it's still classified. But I can tell you that I was an M.P. there when the event occurred."

The memory of that night make her pause and take a deep breath. How she had seen her battle buddies killed.

How she had tried to run.

How she'd failed.

"And while the event was um... kicking off... I guess... I was bitten." She gestures at her shoulder, remembering the feeling of the massive teeth puncturing it as they broke her bones. A shudder runs through her and she has to look away for a moment.

"That must have been terrifying." The woman says, and Samantha can hear genuine sympathy in her voice. This level of empathy must have been why Dr. Munro had chosen her for this interview.

Samantha nods.

"The next thing I remember, I was IN Sturgis." She continues. "I was covered in blood. Hurting. And there was this.... compulsion.... almost like I wasn't in control of what I was doing." She gulped. "And when.... when I looked down I was..... this." She said with a gesture to her body and face.

And before she can let her nerves stop her, Samantha began recounting the tale as the camera records. The reporter asked questions every now and then, all relevant, and only occasionally prying deeply. She's good at her job.

Samantha only needed to take a few breaks to recover.

And when it's done she finds that Dr. Munro was right. She does feel better after having gotten the story out.

\------------------------------

Vickers simmers as he sits on the bed letting the healer examine him.

It had taken nearly an hour to get one of the castle staff members who could clear the imitation kitty litter out of his room using earth magic. And even after that he can smell the traces of the stone on the floor, and things are dusty.

Choi had even painted a small section of the stone blue before he'd used his magic to pulverize it, creating a startlingly convincing replica of the real deal.

"Looks good." Says the healer as she finishes her examination. "All transformative properties were successful. No abnormalities. And your magical flow seems well aligned." She steps in front of him with the glow fading from her eyes. "How do you feel?"

"Constantly overwhelmed by sound and smell." He admitted. "But other than that fine."

"Well then I'd say you're good to go Chief." She says with a smile. "Let us know if anything comes up."

Vickers nods and stands up. He was never a fan of hospitals or this place. But now his enhanced sense of smell makes it almost intolerable.

He was nearly at the seating area where Atrafar was waiting for him when he heard something unexpected.

Something mechanical.

He listened closer for a few moments, focusing on the sound.

It's like a small motor with a bearing messed up somewhere inside. And it was powering something that seemed to almost breath. Maybe some kind of bellows or something.

Curious, both about the sound AND about how accurate his new senses are, Vickers followed the sound.

Its source surprised him, even though it shouldn't have.

A pair of human eyes, glazed over slightly from pain medicine, stare at him with chemically dulled curiosity. A pane of plexiglass separates the two of them.

The sound he had been hearing was the air circulator that had been set up for the sterile room that the so-called Toolies had set up for the Muck Marcher known as Five.

She watched him approach quietly.

Vickers had seen her once before after the battle. He'd been shocked at her survival. And he hadn't had many chances to check in on her status since. So he was even more surprised now. He hadn't expected her to last this long without her suit.

The Toolie in the room with her was busy working on one of the legs of her suit. It was in pieces on a table in front of them as they pressed something into place inside its shin.

Vickers was mildly repulsed by the sight of the..... person.... that had once resided in that suit.

"Good....." A rasping voice said from the other side of the glass. Vickers felt the fur on his neck and back stand up even as the Toolie's head jerked toward the woman. "Fight." She rasped.

Vickers stared at her as he processed the fact that she wasn't just ALIVE... but also cognizant.

"You recognize me?" He asked uncertainly.

She stared at him as she took long, deep, rattling breaths from the tube in her neck.

"Eyes." She said simply.

Vickers raises an eyebrow. Of course it was the eyes.

"Different color." She wheezes. "Same..... person..... behind them." She moves a bit and Vickers gets the sense that she was trying to move an arm. Though she didn't have one. "Tags." She says with a small smirk that only moves half of her mouth. The teeth inside it shine with metal caps.

Vickers doesn't need to look down to suddenly remember that he WAS in fact wearing his dog-tags.

"You're not mad?" He asked.

"No point." She said with a small nod as she settles back a bit. "No.... time."

And just like that he knows what she means.

He'd almost killed her in the desert. Had tried to actually. But simply hadn't had the time or energy to see it finished at the time.

Even then, with his human senses, he'd known that he'd damaged something inside her suit that had been vital. He'd felt it breaking beneath his fists, and smelled the results as he'd stood over her.

And now, months later, she was dying. For real this time

"Lived..... longer..... than... expected..... after bombs." She wheezed. "Good... run."

He looked at the Toolie, and as if knowing what he was going to ask the young man just nodded and shruged. Then turned back to the leg assembly that would likely never see use again anyways.

Vickers turned to walk away when she rasped out one last sentence, stopping him in his tracks.

"Now..... both.... monsters.... our.... own..... making."

He looked back and saw that same, metal-capped, half grin.

Then he resumed walking back out to the waiting area.

Though he couldn't help but study the base of his thumb, and how it no longer bore the small triangular scar anymore.

\--------------------

"So I'm thinking that as a gag we serve Vickers a bunch of raw fish." James said as he bit into the carnitas taco that the castle cooks had just sent out for them to test. It was delicious, but not QUITE right in his mind. "Just for like.... a minute. Then when he gets mad bringing out his real food."

"He's going to kill you." Amina replied as she took a hesitant bite of the al pastor chicken taco, after she'd examined its brightly colored meat. Then she melted as she savored the deliciousness. "Oh muh guds jmsh." She said with a full mouth. The taco didn't last much longer.

"Meh. Worth it." He replied as he wrote the note about the carnitas. They just needed a bit more of the citrus flavoring and he needed to find some kind of cilantro substitute. "Mom, how's the ceviche?" He asked as he saw her take a bite with the chips he'd made.

His mom's mouth opened and raw fish plopped out onto the napkin she held underneath it.

"Did you make it with the uh... smeplie juice?" She asked as she grabbed for the pitcher of water.

"Yeah. They don't have limes or lemons here." He admitted. "Did it not work? I added salt."

His mom took a mouthful of water and swished it around before spitting it into one of the empty cups.

"It did not mijo." She said. James struggled not to laugh.

The doors to the small dining area slammed open and the three of them looked, surprised to see Joey standing in the doorway. His eyes were glowing faintly green.

"Jojo?" James asked curiously.

"It worked!" Joey exclaimed.

Amina's mouth dropped open, letting a bit of carnitas and tortilla fall out in her surprise.

"Are those tacos?" Joey asked.

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Driscoll looked at the small blurb on his HUD with intense interest as Brick droned on and on about some bar fight he'd been in. Driscoll had heard it before.

Or at least that's what he felt like, even though he only felt the words of the story gain familiarity AS they were spoken.

>\-WARNING!-BLOOD TOXICITY NEUTRALIZERS AT 50%

That couldn't be right.

He ran through his suit's status feeds.

Limbs and motors were fine. Though his damaged arm was reading as such.

Energy was fine. Not a surprise given the miniature reactor in his pack. Plus solar, thermal, and movement based generators scattered about the whole suit.

But there were three things that were wrong.

The neutralizers were one of them.

The nutrient paste was another. It was down to only twenty five percent. His suit, when fully loaded, had enough to last him nearly six months. He hadn't topped it off before the battle because food was readily available. But he'd still been sitting at nearly eighty percent when the fighting had kicked off.

Where was the rest? He hadn't eaten any that he could remember.

Yet as his tongue checked the tube, and the section of his mouth nearest it, he felt the tell tale seam in his mouth that meant he'd been "on the drip" for a while now. That was what they called it when he and his comrades went deep for extended periods of time and fed solely off of the admittedly disgusting, but vitamin and calorie rich paste. It left a small dent on the side of the mouth from where the tube went. And he had one again.

He looked at Brick as the small man segued into a story about some festival in some country named Vatria.

Did he.... know... Brick?

Thinking back he couldn't remember anything about the man save what he could see now.

Yet he KNEW that he and Brick had become..... if not friends, then at least buddies.... over the past few-

MONTHS!

Something screamed in his head as his eyes were drawn to the last issue on his HUD.

>MEMORY STORAGE:
>
>\-POSITIONAL DATA=5%
>
>\-SENSOR DATA= 13%
>
>\-COMMUNICATION DATA (SAVED)= 21.5%
>
>\-V/A DATA = 49% **
>
>\-OTHER= 3%

Driscoll stared at the stars.

They meant that the suit had tried to backup the data by either sending it back to command or prompting him to use an encrypted connection to upload it.

He selected the stars and saw that it had made ten different attempts.

Then he looked over at the other window and saw no videos or recordings save those he had already seen. And those didn't account for all the V/A data saved.

His suit had nearly thirty terabytes of space on their drives. A lot of it was taken up by the suit's OS. But there was room to spare. And in a single mission their sensors and everything else could fill the space easily if they didn't routinely upload it for command.

So why, if his V/A files were almost empty, was he reading as being almost half full of that kind of data. With numerous upload/backup requests.

And as Brick once again segued into a story that felt as familiar as it did novel, Driscoll began to dig into his suit's files.

One at a time.

It would take days. But he'd make time.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10gh783/wait_is_this_just_gate_298/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (297/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10ekz0b/wait_is_this_just_gate_296/) /
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And when it's done she finds that Dr. Munro was right. She does feel better after having gotten the story out.

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Vickers simmers as he sits on the bed letting the healer examine him.

It had taken nearly an hour to get one of the castle staff members who could clear the imitation kitty litter out of his room using earth magic. And even after that he can smell the traces of the stone on the floor, and things are dusty.

Choi had even painted a small section of the stone blue before he'd used his magic to pulverize it, creating a startlingly convincing replica of the real deal.

"Looks good." Says the healer as she finishes her examination. "All transformative properties were successful. No abnormalities. And your

magical flow seems well aligned." She steps in front of him with the glow fading from her eyes. "How do you feel?"

"Constantly overwhelmed by sound and smell." He admitted. "But other than that fine."

"Well then I'd say you're good to go Chief." She says with a smile. "Let us know if anything comes up."

Vickers nods and stands up. He was never a fan of hospitals or this place. But now his enhanced sense of smell makes it almost intolerable.

He was nearly at the seating area where Atrafar was waiting for him when he heard something unexpected.

Something mechanical.

He listened closer for a few moments, focusing on the sound.

It's like a small motor with a bearing messed up somewhere inside. And it was powering something that seemed to almost breath. Maybe some kind of bellows or something.

Curious, both about the sound AND about how accurate his new senses are, Vickers followed the sound.

Its source surprised him, even though it shouldn't have.

A pair of human eyes, glazed over slightly from pain medicine, stare at him with chemically dulled curiosity. A pane of plexiglass separates the two of them.

The sound he had been hearing was the air circulator that had been set up for the sterile room that the so-called Toolies had set up for the Muck Marcher known as Five.

She watched him approach quietly.

Vickers had seen her once before after the battle. He'd been shocked at her survival. And he hadn't had many chances to check in on her status since. So he was even more surprised now. He hadn't expected her to last this long without her suit.

The Toolie in the room with her was busy working on one of the legs of her suit. It was in pieces on a table in front of them as they pressed something into place inside its shin.

Vickers was mildly repulsed by the sight of the..... person.... that had once resided in that suit.

"Good....." A rasping voice said from the other side of the glass. Vickers felt the fur on his neck and back stand up even as the Toolie's head jerked toward the woman. "Fight." She rasped.

Vickers stared at her as he processed the fact that she wasn't just ALIVE... but also cognizant.

"You recognize me?" He asked uncertainly.

She stared at him as she took long, deep, rattling breaths from the tube in her neck.

"Eyes." She said simply.

Vickers raises an eyebrow. Of course it was the eyes.

"Different color." She wheezes. "Same..... person..... behind them." She moves a bit and Vickers gets the sense that she was trying to move an arm. Though she didn't have one. "Tags." She says with a small smirk that only moves half of her mouth. The teeth inside it shine with metal caps.

Vickers doesn't need to look down to suddenly remember that he WAS in fact wearing his dog-tags.

"You're not mad?" He asked.

"No point." She said with a small nod as she settles back a bit. "No.... time."

And just like that he knows what she means.

He'd almost killed her in the desert. Had tried to actually. But simply hadn't had the time or energy to see it finished at the time.

Even then, with his human senses, he'd known that he'd damaged something inside her suit that had been vital. He'd felt it breaking beneath his fists, and smelled the results as he'd stood over her.

And now, months later, she was dying. For real this time

"Lived..... longer..... than... expected..... after bombs." She wheezed. "Good... run."

He looked at the Toolie, and as if knowing what he was going to ask the young man just nodded and shruged. Then turned back to the leg assembly that would likely never see use again anyways.

Vickers turned to walk away when she rasped out one last sentence, stopping him in his tracks.

"Now..... both.... monsters.... our.... own..... making."

He looked back and saw that same, metal-capped, half grin.

Then he resumed walking back out to the waiting area.

Though he couldn't help but study the base of his thumb, and how it no longer bore the small triangular scar anymore.

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"So I'm thinking that as a gag we serve Vickers a bunch of raw fish." James said as he bit into the carnitas taco that the castle cooks had just sent out for them to test. It was delicious, but not QUITE right in his mind. "Just for like.... a minute. Then when he gets mad bringing out his real food."

"He's going to kill you." Amina replied as she took a hesitant bite of the al pastor chicken taco, after she'd examined its brightly colored meat. Then she melted as she savored the deliciousness. "Oh muh guds jmsh." She said with a full mouth. The taco didn't last much longer.

"Meh. Worth it." He replied as he wrote the note about the carnitas. They just needed a bit more of the citrus flavoring and he needed to find some kind of cilantro substitute. "Mom, how's the ceviche?" He asked as he saw her take a bite with the chips he'd made.

His mom's mouth opened and raw fish plopped out onto the napkin she held underneath it.

"Did you make it with the uh... smeplie juice?" She asked as she grabbed for the pitcher of water.

"Yeah. They don't have limes or lemons here." He admitted. "Did it not work? I added salt."

His mom took a mouthful of water and swished it around before spitting it into one of the empty cups.

"It did not mijo." She said. James struggled not to laugh.

The doors to the small dining area slammed open and the three of them looked, surprised to see Joey standing in the doorway. His eyes were glowing faintly green.

"Jojo?" James asked curiously.

"It worked!" Joey exclaimed.

Amina's mouth dropped open, letting a bit of carnitas and tortilla fall out in her surprise.

"Are those tacos?" Joey asked.

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Driscoll looked at the small blurb on his HUD with intense interest as Brick droned on and on about some bar fight he'd been in. Driscoll had heard it before.

Or at least that's what he felt like, even though he only felt the words of the story gain familiarity AS they were spoken.

>\-WARNING!-
>
>BLOOD TOXICITY NEUTRALIZERS AT 50%

That couldn't be right.

He ran through his suit's status feeds.

Limbs and motors were fine. Though his damaged arm was reading as such.

Energy was fine. Not a surprise given the miniature reactor in his pack. Plus solar, thermal, and movement based generators scattered about the whole suit.

But there were three things that were wrong.

The neutralizers were one of them.

The nutrient paste was another. It was down to only twenty five percent. His suit, when fully loaded, had enough to last him nearly six months. He hadn't topped it off before the battle because food was readily available. But he'd still been sitting at nearly eighty percent when the fighting had kicked off.

Where was the rest? He hadn't eaten any that he could remember.

Yet as his tongue checked the tube, and the section of his mouth nearest it, he felt the tell tale seam in his mouth that meant he'd been "on the drip" for a while now. That was what they called it when he and his comrades went deep for extended periods of time and fed solely off of the admittedly disgusting, but vitamin and calorie rich paste. It left a small dent on the side of the mouth from where the tube went. And he had one again.

He looked at Brick as the small man segued into a story about some festival in some country named Vatria.

Did he.... know... Brick?

Thinking back he couldn't remember anything about the man save what he could see now.

Yet he KNEW that he and Brick had become..... if not friends, then at least buddies.... over the past few-

MONTHS!

Something screamed in his head as his eyes were drawn to the last issue on his HUD.

>MEMORY STORAGE:
>
>\-POSITIONAL DATA=5%

>
>\-SENSOR DATA= 13%
>
>\-COMMUNICATION DATA (SAVED)= 21.5%
>
>\-V/A DATA = 49% **
>
>\-OTHER= 3%

Driscoll stared at the stars.

They meant that the suit had tried to backup the data by either sending it back to command or prompting him to use an encrypted connection to upload it.

He selected the stars and saw that it had made ten different attempts.

Then he looked over at the other window and saw no videos or recordings save those he had already seen. And those didn't account for all the V/A data saved.

His suit had nearly thirty terabytes of space on their drives. A lot of it was taken up by the suit's OS. But there was room to spare. And in a single mission their sensors and everything else could fill the space easily if they didn't routinely upload it for command.

So why, if his V/A files were almost empty, was he reading as being almost half full of that kind of data. With numerous upload/backup requests.

And as Brick once again segued into a story that felt as familiar as it did novel, Driscoll began to dig into his suit's files.

One at a time.

It would take days. But he'd make time.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10ggt98/wait_is_this_just_gate_298/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (296/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10b894r/wait_is_this_just_gate_295/)

Writer's note: Hmmmm.... those are interesting developments.

Enjoy.

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Choi and Amina were walking past the castle's main entrance, looking over the list of people that had been invited to the wedding, when they saw Vickers for the first time since his transformation. Atrafar walked

next to him in her day clothes, though she still had her gauntlets on, and was helping him maneuver through the bustling people in his unfamiliar form.

"Hey dude." Choi said as they passed. "Sick paint job."

"Congratulations Chief." Amina said in kind, then went back to checking the list.

"Thanks." Vickers said as he and Atrafar moved into the building.

Vickers watched the distracted couple continue moving in mounting confusion.

"Wait." He called out. "Is that all you've got to say?" He asked.

Amina and James paused and turned back, though Amina kept reading the list.

"We're a little busy dude. Wedding and all." Choi said as he finally looked over Vickers' new form fully. "You want me to make a catnip joke or something. You look cool. Good Job. Good to see you Atrafar." He added with a wave, which Atrafar returned with a nod.

Then the two of them departed again.

"Hmmm." Atrafar hummed. "Not the reaction I expected."

Vickers simply watched them leave, confused. He'd just made a massive lifestyle change. And that was it?

"Which way to your quarters?" Atrafar asked, determined to keep them on task. "We need to drop off your stuff. Then we can get you some new gear at the shops."

Vickers did what he could not to let his annoyance show, though he doubted it was working.

He'd spent the last four days in the building that had been used for his conversion. The first two had been the conversion itself, and a day of mostly sleeping and bathing in hot water to relax his muscles. Days three and four had been about learning how to move again.

Walking had been the biggest difficulty. His new legs were longer, and his feet were like any feline or canine animal where his ankles were farther back and higher up, resulting in him walking on tip toes as a default. It made things difficult and tiring. But he was getting used to it.

The biggest change was his senses.

His tinnitus, a result of years of exposure to gunfire and explosions, was gone. In its place was a sense of hearing that could hear people's heartbeats if he was withing a few feet of them. His sense of smell was

so strong that most of the time he had to resist throwing up as he smelled people's sweat and....other.... scents coming from their bodies. It was revealingly disgusting.

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But he was up and moving, and Jaegheri had cleared him for release under Atrafar's guidance. Once the other converted people had been dispatched to the care of their host families, the two of them had left for the castle.

Vickers..... wasn't sure how he felt about leading Atrafar to his room. But they did need to get his stuff there. Mostly his old clothes and a few new sets of robes like the ones he was wearing.

He didn't want to stoke the fires of the jokes that Choi kept making.

Then he and Atrafar actually reached his room and his nose gave him a warning that something was amiss.

"Why does it smell like...." She began beside him, her sense of smell much stronger than even his own. "What does that smell like?"

Vickers thought he had an idea of what the smell was as he opened the door with his eyes closed.

Then he stepped in and was met with a grating, crunching, noise beneath his feet.

Vickers' eye twitched as he opened it and beheld his rooms new floor.

"Why is your bedroom floor covered in gravel sand?" Atrafar asked as she bent down to study some of it.

"CHOOOOIIIIII!!!!!" He yelled as he saw the hundreds of pounds of crushed gravel, that he knew was meant to emulate kitty litter, scattered about his room.

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"Was that Vickers?" Amina asked as she and James continued walking.

"Yeah, we should keep walking." James said as he subtly sped up his pace. "Faster." He said as he continued accelerating. "In fact. I'm gonna run for a bit."

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"So....." One of the soldiers present began, bringing voice to all of their thoughts. "What do we do now?"

That had been the golden question since they'd sealed up the blight patch the day before.

The moment they'd recovered from their initial shock at the experiment's success Veliry and the General had both ordered everyone to back away from it. A cordon had been set around it and nobody had been able to go near it.

But it had just been sitting there, not doing anything. None of the other blight patches had done anything either, and none of the blight possessed had appeared to harass them.

"Now." Veliry said in response to the soldier's question. "We move it."

Joey gulped at the thought, his eyes glowing very faintly as he reined in his mind.

"Then what?" General Sigbert asked, concern evident in his voice too.

"Uuuuuh. We'll saddle that Bogren when we de-spike it?" She mused. Joey looked at her curiously at the odd metaphor.

"Aye." Sigbert said as if that made sense.

The three of them, plus the dwarf mage that Joey had worked with before moved forward. Sigbert cautiously kicked at the bag with his foot, as if expecting it to wake up and attack. When it didn't he bent down and picked up one of the poles that lifted and opened it's entrance.

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"You four." The General said as he waved over some of his soldiers. "Pick up the back of the bag."

The soldiers nodded hesitantly, then joined in as they lifted the back end of the bag up.

"Still light." Joey said. "Can you guys roll it up?"

The four new soldiers looked at each other. Then Sigbert nodded at them over Veliry's head.

Slowly, and nervously, the four soldiers began rolling the bag up like a sleeping bag.

And nothing happened.

Then they began moving the bag away from the other blight patches, slowly, step by step.

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"Okay." The General said once they'd moved a few yards with no effect on the bag's contents. "Um... what now?"

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10fltus/wait_is_this_just_gate_297/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (296/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10b87cr/wait_is_this_just_gate_295/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (295/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10aeesi/wait_is_this_just_gate_294/)

Writer's note: Section 1= wholesomeness.

Section 2= a different kind of wholesomeness and toe beans.

Section 3= SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE (you know, by magical fantasy land standards. No actual science.) And just a tiny bit of wholesomeness, even if it makes someone uncomfortable.

Enjoy.

Also, I won't be back on until tuesday.

\~

For James and Amina, the four days between when her youngest sister and oldest brother had arrived and when their wedding was scheduled were a blur.

The first night was a large dinner and banquet to celebrate the return of all the King's children, and James got to know Xarina and Ferria a bit better, while also discussing the desert battle with Xarina and Alixan. Amina and Ferria also got into a heated debate about politics and the role of religion in government. James opted not to even come near that conversation as he and Xarina egged on the two brothers in a drinking contest.

To James the following days were a non-stop flurry of planning, activity, and coordination that he hadn't even seen matched by his unit's preparation for N.T.C. back on Earth. And that had been an entire stryker batallion coordinating what was effectively a small deployment across the country.

He was, thanks largely to his culinary endeavors that had by now swept across Petravia, been put in charge of figuring out the menu for the wedding and after party. He decided, with the King's permission, to keep things simple. The wedding would simply have an open bar and servers

with trays of finger foods available. The party however was a tougher nut to crack. He didn't want to repeat his prior food reveals of burgers, soup, and pizza.

So he taught the castle cook staff how to run a taco bar. He taught them the basics of making carne asada, carnitas, al pastor, and all the fixings to go with them using this world's equivalent ingredients. The fact that the food was easy to make en masse, and easy to serve on the fly made it ideal. Plus it allowed him to use the two fondue fountains he'd helped make to serve melted cheese for the tacos, and melted chocolate for the churros that he also taught them how to make.

Amina had struggles of her own. For the first day she attempted to run the event's security detail and organize the castles defensive measures. Her brother Alixan didn't need prompting from his sisters to take the reins of that particular task into his own hands. He was a General too after all.

Then she attempted to take over decorations. But the youngest of the siblings, her sister Ferria, quickly took control of that from her after she'd attempted, in her admittedly understandable paranoia, to make everyone wear armor.

Instead she was put in charge of helping James rehearse the ceremonial part of the wedding and help him merge the traditions of their two home worlds together in a way that would appease the local nobility, while also making James's people happy.

James, seeing how flustered she was, used it as a chance to remind her of the traditional dance that he'd taught the small lumber based village after their battle with the grabber clan almost a year and a half before.

James's mother walked in on the young couple dancing as she looked for James to ask about what he was wearing for the ceremony.

She paused in the door and watched the two of them dancing around each other in circles while flapping their arms and bobbing their heads to the timeless chicken dance that played from his phone, and laughing. She couldn't help but smile as she remembered her own wedding decades before.

"That can not possibly be-" Amina began as she wheezed for breath from laughter. "a required dance at weddings on your world." She said as he wrapped an arm around her waist and pulling her close.

"I'm afraid it is actually." Mrs. Choi said, startling the two of them.

"Hey mom." James said, still smiling. "What's going on?"

"I was just wondering what you were going to wear?" She said as she stepped a little further into the room. "I know you have a dress uniform, but I was just wondering."

"Ooh, I've wondered that too." Amina chimed in as she finally settled herself.

James's face suddenly beamed with a mischievous grin.

"I'm afraid." He said as he mocked zipping his lips. "That I can't tell you mom."

"What?" She asked with a look of annoyance at her son's antics. Her hand found its way to her hip as she glared at him.

"It's a secret." He said as he pointedly ignored her anger. "You'll see." Then he looked at Amina, who was also looking at him with annoyed curiosity. "And you just wouldn't get what it is."

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She nodded, impressed. "Unfortunately one of our conversions lost themselves to it." She said. "And his type allowed him to almost escape. Luckily he didn't retain enough intelligence to actually get around the cage. But he did hurt himself badly enough that a... mercy killing.... was deemed necessary."

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He new what she was talking about. He himself wasn't an overly emotional person. But he, like most "lifelong warriors" as she'd called them, knew more than a little bit about night terrors.

The thought of how his new mind, his new primal instincts, might be affected by them was a concerning notion to him.

He nodded understanding as he walked into the room and opened the chest to see what was inside.

"The elder will return with food soon." She said behind him. "Plenty of nice juicy meat for you. Keep the door closed unless you need to use the bathroom. A few of the other people are prey species and we don't need any accidents to occur."

"Got it." He said as he plopped down onto the bed. He could do hurry up and wait.

"And Sebastien?" She asked before she shut the cage door.

He looked at her curiously.

"Congratulations." She said with a slight nod.

"Thanks." He said, returning the nod.

"Rest up."

"Will do." He said as he laid back in the bed. He raised his hand up in front of him and practiced making the claws extend and retract a few times.

He could still smell his blood on the floor beneath him despite how well they'd tried to clean it.

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"Ready?" Veliry asked as she and the mage on her side of the bag grabbed the two poles on their side.

Joey looked at the older dwarf mage on his side with him. He'd taken the upper pole just in case. The dwarf nodded.

"Yep." He replied.

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Joey couldn't help but look into the massive bottomless bag with mild curiosity. It was odd seeing so much darkness inside something that should have been fairly well lit. But that was a question for later as he and the dwarf shuffled to their right.

And the whole bag moved toward the large, slightly football shaped, patch of vanishing blight.

Joey cringed back a bit as he did. He knew from D&D rules and a handful of video games based on them that having two extra-dimensional spaces intermingle was a bad idea. But that was just game logic. He actually had no idea what to expect here. This was all hypothesis work and his best guess was as good as anyone else's.

Before he knew it, the inky darkness of the bag's interior and the fuzzy nothingness of the blight were mixing.

And as soon as they did, he and the other three mages began having to push to continue moving.

The bar he was holding was vibrating. It was as if millions of bees or hornets had landed on it and were using every ounce of flight power they had to resist the advance of the mages and the bag.

And the metal beneath his hands was heating up.

"What in the hells?" The dwarf asked in confusion.

"It's resisting somehow!" Veliry exclaimed. "Keep pushing!"

Joey hadn't had any intentions not to. He planted his shoulder behind the bar and marveled at how the buzzing vibration suddenly seemed to transfer to his collar bone too. Whatever it was, it was more violent of a vibration than his hands had led him to believe.

"Come help us!" Veliry demanded as she waved some of the soldiers present over. They jogged to assist as Joey's feet dug into the ground.

General Sigbert's massive hand clamped onto the pole just above his head and the large man grunted as he pushed along side Joey.

For just a moment Joey looked over at the opening and saw the darkness in the bag moving. It was hard for his brain to understand it. But it looked as though the blight was pushing it, forcing it to flex inward as if it was an elastic surface that it was being pressed into.

Then, as they moved forward just a fraction of an inch, he saw a bit of the blight move INTO the darkness of the bag.

"It's doing it." He grunted between breaths. "It's moving!"

"Keep pushing!" The General roared. "Put your backs into it or go on extra duty later you bastards!" He challenged his soldiers.

The soldiers who had previously been holding the bag up dropped it in favor of rushing over to help, and suddenly Joey was being pressed into the pole by the weight of their bodies. He forced energy into his eyes, and they began to glow, as he actively resisted being overwhelmed by everything going on.

There was a loud ripping noise, and for a moment Joey feared that one of the poles had ripped through its channel in the bag's mouth. Then there was a loud bang, just shy of gunshot volume.

Then they all fell over.

The poles landed on top of them in a mostly muffled clatter. He was suddenly reminded of a tug-o-war he'd seen in middle school where one side had tricked the other and simply released their end of the rope the second the whistle had blown.

After a moment of disentangling themselves Joey looked up to see what had happened.

He blinked a few times, his eyes still glowing behind his lids as he did.

The bag was lying flat on the ground.

And the air above it was empty.

Not empty in a magical, formless, hard-to-look-at, void kind of way. But just plain empty like it was supposed to be.

"IT WORKED!" Veliry yelled as she shot to her feet. Joey and the soldiers joined her, clambering up ignorant of the dirt on their clothes and staring with wide eyes at the space the blight HAD been in. "IT WORKED!"

Cautiously, and mildly afraid of what would happen when he did so, Joey lifted the edge of the bag up to peer inside.

All he saw was the familiar darkness that was supposed to be there.

He looked back up at the normal, empty, air again.

"Holy shit." He said softly.

"It worked." Another soldier said just as softly.

Suddenly a pair of small arms were wrapped around Joey's neck as Veliry leapt up into his arms and planted a quick kiss on his cheek. This made him lose focus on his spell as he blushed furiously.

"It worked!" She said. "Joey you're a genius! IT WORKED!"

Then she realized what she'd done and quickly pulled back. But she planted her hands on his shoulders and looked him in the eyes.

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"By the gods." Sigbert said from next to them. Then he lifted Joey AND Veliry up in a bear-hug and also planted a kiss on both of their cheeks.

Joey looked at him. Still reeling from EVERYTHING that had just happened.

"It worked." He echoed.

Then everyone burst into motion as they began to investigate the results.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10el0wv/wait_is_this_just_gate_296/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (295/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10aedgq/wait_is_this_just_gate_294/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Section 1= wholesomeness.

Section 2= a different kind of wholesomeness and toe beans.

Section 3= SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE (you know, by magical fantasy land standards. No actual science.) And just a tiny bit of wholesomeness, even if it makes someone uncomfortable.

Enjoy.

Also, I won't be back on until tuesday.

\~

For James and Amina, the four days between when her youngest sister and oldest brother had arrived and when their wedding was scheduled were a blur.

The first night was a large dinner and banquet to celebrate the return of all the King's children, and James got to know Xarina and Ferria a bit better, while also discussing the desert battle with Xarina and Alixan. Amina and Ferria also got into a heated debate about politics and the role of religion in government. James opted not to even come near that conversation as he and Xarina egged on the two brothers in a drinking contest.

To James the following days were a non-stop flurry of planning, activity, and coordination that he hadn't even seen matched by his unit's preparation for N.T.C. back on Earth. And that had been an entire stryker batallion coordinating what was effectively a small deployment across the country.

He was, thanks largely to his culinary endeavors that had by now swept across Petravia, been put in charge of figuring out the menu for the wedding and after party. He decided, with the King's permission, to keep things simple. The wedding would simply have an open bar and servers with trays of finger foods available. The party however was a tougher nut to crack. He didn't want to repeat his prior food reveals of burgers, soup, and pizza.

So he taught the castle cook staff how to run a taco bar. He taught them the basics of making carne asada, carnitas, al pastor, and all the fixings to go with them using this world's equivalent ingredients. The fact that the food was easy to make en masse, and easy to serve on the

fly made it ideal. Plus it allowed him to use the two fondue fountains he'd helped make to serve melted cheese for the tacos, and melted chocolate for the churros that he also taught them how to make.

Amina had struggles of her own. For the first day she attempted to run the event's security detail and organize the castles defensive measures. Her brother Alixan didn't need prompting from his sisters to take the reins of that particular task into his own hands. He was a General too after all.

Then she attempted to take over decorations. But the youngest of the siblings, her sister Ferria, quickly took control of that from her after she'd attempted, in her admittedly understandable paranoia, to make everyone wear armor.

Instead she was put in charge of helping James rehearse the ceremonial part of the wedding and help him merge the traditions of their two home worlds together in a way that would appease the local nobility, while also making James's people happy.

James, seeing how flustered she was, used it as a chance to remind her of the traditional dance that he'd taught the small lumber based village after their battle with the grabber clan almost a year and a half before.

James's mother walked in on the young couple dancing as she looked for James to ask about what he was wearing for the ceremony.

She paused in the door and watched the two of them dancing around each other in circles while flapping their arms and bobbing their heads to the timeless chicken dance that played from his phone, and laughing. She couldn't help but smile as she remembered her own wedding decades before.

"That can not possibly be-" Amina began as she wheezed for breath from laughter. "a required dance at weddings on your world." She said as he wrapped an arm around her waist and pulling her close.

"I'm afraid it is actually." Mrs. Choi said, startling the two of them.

"Hey mom." James said, still smiling. "What's going on?"

"I was just wondering what you were going to wear?" She said as she stepped a little further into the room. "I know you have a dress uniform, but I was just wondering."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/10ekz0b/wait_is_this_just_gate_296/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (294/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/109gub7/wait_is_this_just_gate_293/)

Writer's note: Yaaaaay more characters to keep track of, and a new nation to involve in..... stuff.

[*yaaaaay*](https://media.tenor.com/cubzTWxB6rUAAAAC/applause-clapping.gif)

Enjoy.

\~

When Vickers awoke, he did so to the startling feeling of being in water.

He jumped a bit in an attempt to get up and out. But a firm hand on his shoulder, coupled with screaming muscles and a pounding migraine, prevented him from doing so.

"Relax, new blood." The rumbling voice of Jaegheri said before his hand had a chance to intercept the restraining limb. "You are safe."

Vickers took a moment to take in his new surroundings.

He was in some kind of large bathtub. He could smell salt in the water, which explained how he was remaining above the surface. But he also smelled flowers, and herbs, and several other things he couldn't place, but which reminded him of a forest after the rain.

He also smelled blood, which alarmed him for a moment until he remembered the state he had been in before he'd passed out. Of course the water had blood in it.

A single, small, candle lit the room from high up near the door and smelled of cinnamon and citrus.

Yet despite the minuscule amount of lighting, he could see everything as clearly as if the sun was out, and he knew that if he could look in a mirror he would see his pupils dilated far wider than ever before.

Something in his mind complained about being wet. But his body quickly shut down its protests as his weary muscles relaxed and loosened from the warmth of the bath.

"Where?" He asked.

"Same building."Jaegheri answered simply. "Just upstairs." And even though Vickers' ears were submerged..... and also much further back on his head than normal, he heard the man much clearer than he should have. "How do you feel?"

Vickers hands quested over his stomach and thigh as they inspected the new body they were a part of now.

"Feel like Choi's drake ate me and I survived the trip." He said after a moment. "Feel big."

"You are." The werefolk said as he scanned the bathing man's physique for a moment. "You already were. But you've put on at least a foot and good third of your original weight in muscle."

"Hmmm." Vickers hummed as he considered the numbers. "Big."

"Indeed. How are your senses?"

"I can smell the blood downstairs." Vickers answered. "And the.... other stuff. Did I piss myself too?" He wondered. "During the change?"

Jaegheri shrugged. "Most do. It wouldn't surprise me." Then he snapped his fingers and Vickers winced as the sound made his head throb. "Hearing is good. Even muffled."

"Yeah." Vickers agreed. "Very good. What's a.... a night brother? Is that what you called me?"

"I'm surprised you remembered that." Jaegheri replied. Then he rummaged around on a table out of Vickers' line of sight. A moment later he held a hand mirror up above Vickers, though he paused before he got it to where anything could be seen. "Prepare." He said sternly. Vickers looked at him curiously. "This is your truth now. Your life."

Then he moved the mirror up in front of Vickers' face.

The face of a predator, with gleaming green eyes, looked back at him.

He recoiled and looked away for a moment as his brain tried to line things up.

Then he looked back, and saw that the eyes sat in a face coated in dark brown, almost black, fur with even darker patches that he knew were his new spots. His hand reached up to touch his new face. To feel the snout that jutted out over a massively muscular jaw. To touch the points of teeth that looked like they could pierce armor. To caress the area around his eyes and feel them move as he instinctively blinked.

Then he looked at the hands and saw how long and thick his fingers were now. He flexed them and a set of sharp claws extended with hooks designed to latch onto prey and hold in in place as he killed it.

And by god did he long to do so.

His mouth salivated immediately as the thought of prey brought the smell of the blood downstairs to the front of his mind. He could smell the Lunar Council elder, who he knew wasn't even IN the building anymore, and he wanted nothing more than to hunt him down and latch onto him. Feel his bones crunching between his tee-

Suddenly a raw steak materialized in front of his face, held in the hand of Jaegheri, who had pulled it from a bottomless bag nearby.

A single drop of blood fell and Vickers lurched to catch it with his tongue before the pain in his muscles prevented him from doing so.

"And now you learn the downside." Jaegheri said grimly as Vickers' hand rose up and clutched at the steak. Jaegheri held it fast despite the

anger in his new kin's eyes. "We warned you about it as best we could. But experiencing it is the only way to know its truth."

He let the steak go and it practically disappeared into Vickers' mouth.

The human part of his mind recoiled at the action. He'd eaten plenty of disgusting things in his life. Especially in survival training to become a seal, and out in the field during deployments. But the act of eating a steak raw, with the small circular bone included, repulsed him.

But god the meat and blood were delicious, and exactly what his exhausted body desired. And it was still warm! Jagheri must have put the steak in the bag almost as soon as the creature it had been part of had been killed. He crunched the bone in it into a slurry of powdered bone and marrow.

"Night brothers are one in a hundred." Jaegheri said as he finished the meat, ignoring the ravenously questing eyes of the man beneath him. "I've never created one myself until now." He made no move to retrieve any more food. "It is an omen of luck."

Realizing that no more meat would be made available, at least not yet, Vickers spoke again.

"Good or bad?" He asked as he licked his lips. He winced as he accidentally bit his own tongue, then his eyes widened as the pain disappeared almost immediately.

"Depends on the person." Atrafar said as she opened the door to the room and stepped in with a set of towels and robes folded in her arms. "But for a person like you? With your skill set? Probably bad."

"Really?" Vickers asked.

"Yeah." She replied. "For anyone who gets in your way."

\------------------

Joey stepped through the doorway and into the fields outside of Jadesport for the first time and stumbled a bit as he tripped on the thick grass.

"Careful." Veliry said as she gripped his arm and helped him back up. "Welcome to Jadesport Joey." She said as she released him and he dusted off his pants a bit.

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As they finished the announcement, a somewhat short stature man, likely a few inches shorter than James, stepped up to the top of the cloth staircase on the ship. He was wearing a bright, topaz-blue, robe that reminded James of something from Mexico or central America. His hair and skin were opposites of each other, with the former being nearly snow white, and his skin being even darker than James's deceased former Sergeant.

"And his most holy wife, and bishop second of Southern Vatria!" The man announced as a woman who could have been Amina's twin, albeit with blonde hair and less muscle, took the offered hand and joined the man on the top of the stairs. "Petravian Princess Ferria!"

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The two of them began strutting down the stairs, her just a half step ahead of him, and approached.

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"Ambassador Tanier." He said as the other man matched the half bow and arm gesture and the two men bumped forearms against each other's. "It has been too long since we've welcomed you to the capital."

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"So I do." Replied King Farrick as he stepped up next to the ambassador and wrapped his daughter in his arms. She kissed him lightly on the cheek before they broke the embrace. "I must demand a tour once you have had a chance to relax. How are you dear?" He asked of his daughter. She smiled and nodded.

"I shall show you what I am allowed." Tanier said enthusiastically. "I can even take you on a flight if you'd like."

Then the three sisters were greeting each other with hugs and whispers, and James once again felt like a third wheel.

"It's going to be like this until they're gone." Said a familiar, though entirely unexpected voice from just behind James, causing him to jump a bit even as Artair looked up with a grin.

"Alixan?" Amina asked curiously. "When did you get here?"

Standing just behind James was the nearly eight foot tall crown prince, who had somehow arrived at the castle with none of them knowing

"About an hour ago." He said with a grin. "I stopped for a drink first."

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As if that was a cue, Amina held her hand out to him and pulled her into the gaggle of sisters and began bragging about all his exploits to her youngest sister.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10b894r/wait_is_this_just_gate_295/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (294/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/109gs9n/wait_is_this_just_gate_293/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yaaaaay more characters to keep track of, and a new nation to involve in..... stuff.

[*yaaaaay*](https://media.tenor.com/cubzTWxB6rUAAAAC/applause-clapping.gif)

Enjoy.

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When Vickers awoke, he did so to the startling feeling of being in water.

He jumped a bit in an attempt to get up and out. But a firm hand on his shoulder, coupled with screaming muscles and a pounding migraine, prevented him from doing so.

"Relax, new blood." The rumbling voice of Jaegheri said before his hand had a chance to intercept the restraining limb. "You are safe."

Vickers took a moment to take in his new surroundings.

He was in some kind of large bathtub. He could smell salt in the water, which explained how he was remaining above the surface. But he also smelled flowers, and herbs, and several other things he couldn't place, but which reminded him of a forest after the rain.

He also smelled blood, which alarmed him for a moment until he remembered the state he had been in before he'd passed out. Of course the water had blood in it.

A single, small, candle lit the room from high up near the door and smelled of cinnamon and citrus.

Yet despite the minuscule amount of lighting, he could see everything as clearly as if the sun was out, and he knew that if he could look in a mirror he would see his pupils dilated far wider than ever before.

Something in his mind complained about being wet. But his body quickly shut down its protests as his weary muscles relaxed and loosened from the warmth of the bath.

"Where?" He asked.

"Same building."Jaegheri answered simply. "Just upstairs." And even though Vickers' ears were submerged..... and also much further back on his head than normal, he heard the man much clearer than he should have. "How do you feel?"

Vickers hands quested over his stomach and thigh as they inspected the new body they were a part of now.

"Feel like Choi's drake ate me and I survived the trip." He said after a moment. "Feel big."

"You are." The werefolk said as he scanned the bathing man's physique for a moment. "You already were. But you've put on at least a foot and good third of your original weight in muscle."

"Hmmm." Vickers hummed as he considered the numbers. "Big."

"Indeed. How are your senses?"

"I can smell the blood downstairs." Vickers answered. "And the.... other stuff. Did I piss myself too?" He wondered. "During the change?"

Jaegheri shrugged. "Most do. It wouldn't surprise me." Then he snapped his fingers and Vickers winced as the sound made his head throb. "Hearing is good. Even muffled."

"Yeah." Vickers agreed. "Very good. What's a.... a night brother? Is that what you called me?"

"I'm surprised you remembered that." Jaegheri replied. Then he rummaged around on a table out of Vickers' line of sight. A moment later he held a hand mirror up above Vickers, though he paused before he got it to where anything could be seen. "Prepare." He said sternly. Vickers looked at him curiously. "This is your truth now. Your life."

Then he moved the mirror up in front of Vickers' face.

The face of a predator, with gleaming green eyes, looked back at him.

He recoiled and looked away for a moment as his brain tried to line things up.

Then he looked back, and saw that the eyes sat in a face coated in dark brown, almost black, fur with even darker patches that he knew were his new spots. His hand reached up to touch his new face. To feel the snout that jutted out over a massively muscular jaw. To touch the points of teeth that looked like they could pierce armor. To caress the area around his eyes and feel them move as he instinctively blinked.

Then he looked at the hands and saw how long and thick his fingers were now. He flexed them and a set of sharp claws extended with hooks designed to latch onto prey and hold in in place as he killed it.

And by god did he long to do so.

His mouth salivated immediately as the thought of prey brought the smell of the blood downstairs to the front of his mind. He could smell the Lunar Council elder, who he knew wasn't even IN the building anymore, and he wanted nothing more than to hunt him down and latch onto him. Feel his bones crunching between his tee-

Suddenly a raw steak materialized in front of his face, held in the hand of Jaegheri, who had pulled it from a bottomless bag nearby.

A single drop of blood fell and Vickers lurched to catch it with his tongue before the pain in his muscles prevented him from doing so.

"And now you learn the downside." Jaegheri said grimly as Vickers' hand rose up and clutched at the steak. Jaegheri held it fast despite the anger in his new kin's eyes. "We warned you about it as best we could. But experiencing it is the only way to know its truth."

He let the steak go and it practically disappeared into Vickers' mouth.

The human part of his mind recoiled at the action. He'd eaten plenty of disgusting things in his life. Especially in survival training to become a seal, and out in the field during deployments. But the act of eating a steak raw, with the small circular bone included, repulsed him.

But god the meat and blood were delicious, and exactly what his exhausted body desired. And it was still warm! Jagheri must have put the steak in the bag almost as soon as the creature it had been part of had been killed. He crunched the bone in it into a slurry of powdered bone and marrow.

"Night brothers are one in a hundred." Jaegheri said as he finished the meat, ignoring the ravenously questing eyes of the man beneath him. "I've never created one myself until now." He made no move to retrieve any more food. "It is an omen of luck."

Realizing that no more meat would be made available, at least not yet, Vickers spoke again.

"Good or bad?" He asked as he licked his lips. He winced as he accidentally bit his own tongue, then his eyes widened as the pain disappeared almost immediately.

"Depends on the person." Atrafar said as she opened the door to the room and stepped in with a set of towels and robes folded in her arms. "But for a person like you? With your skill set? Probably bad."

"Really?" Vickers asked.

"Yeah." She replied. "For anyone who gets in your way."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (293/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/108pm57/wait_is_this_just_gate_292/)

Writer's note: Hey. Kai's back. Yay.

[*Also, the king is basically me in this conversation.*](https://media.tenor.com/c4kU_UpUJBQAAAAC/mr-incredible-the-incredibles.gif)

Enjoy.

\~

Shil'Varyon'Kai had spent the last few months since the battle in the desert scouring the Deep Dark for more of the Agency's hiding places.

He had known, or at least suspected, the locations of several of them for the past few decades. But the agency rarely interfered with the Deep Dark or any of its denizens. Each of their hiding places had been established at least a few centuries before he had even been born, and the occupants rarely ventured out of them in any tangible way. But his spiders found the locations easily enough.

But their interference had taken a measure of justice from him and his Petravian allies, and he had every intention of recovering this "Chief Driscoll" if he was able.

But every location he checked was the same.

Empty.

Only bodies, poisonous gases, and dust remained in any of the hidden chambers and empty halls he found.

The third such place had had the only thing of any note. A chamber that he recognized as being a golemancy enclave. Several of the bodies bore

magical injuries that matched up with the story James had told him of his fight with a Golem Amalgamation.

They had been discarded as casually as any bit of refuse outside a tavern's kitchen. Their bodies stank and wept foul putrescence that he sensed even through the minds of his spiders.

And even as the most recent sign of activity he'd found, they were clearly months old and forgotten.

Still.... he had to continue searching.

Because of his distance and his narrowed focus on the task at hand, and because it occurred so close to the surface and under a large city, and also because it didn't occur IN the Deep Dark, but simply near it, in a cellar on the outskirts of the capital, Shil'Varyon'Kai didn't notice the door that burst into existence.

Several small spiders, of limited intelligence on their own, and only tangentially under his control, saw the door but thought nothing of it.

And so the door waited for its purpose.

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"So it's attacking again?" The King asked as he listened to his son's report.

"If I'm honest, I don't know." Artair admitted. "But the damage we saw is the same. The injuries on what few villagers were... still present... were just like the injuries we saw in Jadesport. But on a massive scale."

King Farrick turned to Amina, who was reading reports from the garrisons in the area. "Has it, or they, or anything, been tracked?" He asked.

Amina wobbled her head a bit.

"There's a path." She said hesitantly. "But even with instructions on WHAT to look for; the blight spots, the possessed.... they still haven't found the source. And, whatever it is, it's currently moved either into, or over, the Frakian range. It um.... destroyed a mountain. Apparently."

James, who had been sipping from a cup of coffee as he listened in, struggled to resist spitting it out.

"A mountain?" Kor'Os asked as her jaw dropped open. "How is such a thing possible?"

Amina shook her head. "We don't know. We have a small wing of griffin riders flying over the range to see if any more have fallen. But they're progress is slow. We sent orders not to fly too fast in areas where it's presence is suspected, that way they don't fly into it unexpectedly."

King Farrick rubbed his hands over his face. His kingdom had succumbed to disaster after disaster over the past year, and now another one was moving through and his people couldn't even pinpoint its location.

The rest of the people in the room waited for his word.

"Have the griffin riders accompanied by any arbalestiers we can find in the area and convince to join them." He said after a moment. "Supply them with whatever they need for their smoke shot arrows, preferably with as much color in the smoke as possible."

The other people in the room looked at him curiously.

"Once they're equipped and riding, have the arbalestiers fire the arrows ahead of the griffins every few seconds with smoke already billowing." He continued, and both James and Amina saw where he was going. "If the arrows suddenly disappear it will give them ample warning of incoming blight. Also, ensure that they ride in pairs."

Amina looked to one of the soldiers in the room and the two exchanged nods before the soldier marched out of the room to deliver the message.

Xarina considered the idea and then nodded her own approval. She'd have to try that herself. Of course none of her ships HAD found any seaborne blight yet, so she wasn't hopeful about its necessity.

"Should we go inspect it?" James asked. "I can probably be there in a few days. Week if I go around to be safe."

Amina placed a hand over his and shook her head.

"No." The King said. "Not until we figure out WHERE this.... thing... is." He pointed a stern finger at James. "Besides. You have a bad track record with traveling."

James held up his hands in mock surrender. "Just offering." He said. Then to himself he muttered. "It's just why I'm here in the first place."

"We." Veliry cut in. "Are already setting up to try something that Captain Choi's brother, my assistant Joseph, has come up with. No guarantee. But I think it has merit."

"When will we have an answer?" The King asked.

"The other side of the doorway, like the one we used in the desert, should be there in a day or so." Veliry replied. "After that its simply a matter of sizing up one of the blights and enclosing it."

"And if it does work, what can we expect to see?" The King followed up.

"In theory." She began. "We should be able to MOVE, or at the very least CAPTURE the blight. But like any other experiment; we won't know until we've tried."

"Joey came up with that?" James asked curiously. Veliry nodded. James nodded back with a smile. "Nice."

"Keep me updated." The King said, ignoring James's interjection. "In less serious matters." He nodded to Amina and James. "Not that it isn't serious. The wedding is in five days. Are you two ready?"

"Ye-" Amina began.

"Is that it?" Kor'Os cut her off. She looked at Amina and held her hands up in apology. "Sorry General. Your Majesty." She said to the King in apology. "But that's all? An entire village was wiped out. At least a hundred people dead or missing or.... possessed? And an entire lake drained. A lake that hundreds more people rely upon to live is gone. And that's it?"

Artair looked at her with zero shock. He'd known ever since she'd climbed onto his drake behind him that she was bold. But he did watch his father.

"Do you have an alternative solution Commander?" King Farrick asked, keeping his tone flat. "Because if you do, then you're a step ahead of every mage and scholar under my command, and every scientist from Captain Choi's world. Plus who knows how many people in any of the other kingdoms of this world, since we know some of them have blight patches of their own."

Kor'Os hung her head as she sat back down. She hadn't thought of that.

"I understand your frustration commander. I assure you that I feel the same tenfold." The King said with a weary sigh. "But sadly we haven't figured out an answer, or a preventative measure, for what this thing is capable of. Not yet anyways." He pointed at Veliry. "But we are working on one."

Kor'Os deflated a bit. She'd only come to the capital with the prince because she was certain that the King and his staff had to have some kind of answer for this. But she'd never been foolish enough to think that the King had an answer to EVERYTHING. It had just been a hope, and that hopes loss hurt more than she'd expected.

"Everything that CAN be done to solve this, is being done commander." Amina assured her. "But, and please don't let this slip in public, this particular issue was set upon our world by the gods themselves. It is going to take everything we have to solve it."

James bristled subtly at her side as she mentioned the last bit.

"The gods?" Kor'Os asked softly.

"Indeed." The King said. "I am sorry if that upsets you commander. But to the best of our knowledge it is true."

"Well then...." She began. "What CAN we do? Sir?" She asked.

Everyone in the room donned looks of concern and discomfort, even the King.

"We can prepare." James said before anyone else could. "At Jadesport we turned the possessed back. Veliry and my brother are gonna do what they can. So are the other mages. But for the rest of us it's just a matter of prepping as best as we can and hoping we make it through."

He looked at King Farrick, who nodded his approval.

"You're a scout right?" James asked. Kor'Os nodded. "Think you can track something that doesn't like to be seen?"

"Haven't had to in years." She admitted. "But I was one of the top hunters during the last Chamex swarm in the north." She looked at Artair. "Your former Clan mother was one of the few who outscored me."

Artair arched an eyebrow. "That was nasty hunting." He said. "But a good match for this I suppose."

"Think you can find whatever's doing this?" James asked, not wanting to think of Gixelle, who'd been like a big sister to him. "Especially with all the intel we have here in the castle about it."

Kor'Os looked at Amina, who nodded and handed over some of the scrolls and a map. Kor'Os turned away the map in favor of her own though. It was better notated for the area in question.

Outside horns blew marking the return of a member of the royal family.

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realizing it her arms had raised into a guarding position, her silvered gauntlet tips readied to fight.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/10aeesi/wait_is_this_just_gate_294/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (293/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/108pkku/wait_is_this_just_gate_292/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey. Kai's back. Yay.

[*Also, the king is basically me in this conversation.*](https://media.tenor.com/c4kU_UpUJBQAAAAC/mr-incredible-the-incredibles.gif)

Enjoy.

\~

Shil'Varyon'Kai had spent the last few months since the battle in the desert scouring the Deep Dark for more of the Agency's hiding places.

He had known, or at least suspected, the locations of several of them for the past few decades. But the agency rarely interfered with the Deep Dark or any of its denizens. Each of their hiding places had been established at least a few centuries before he had even been born, and the occupants rarely ventured out of them in any tangible way. But his spiders found the locations easily enough.

But their interference had taken a measure of justice from him and his Petravian allies, and he had every intention of recovering this "Chief Driscoll" if he was able.

But every location he checked was the same.

Empty.

Only bodies, poisonous gases, and dust remained in any of the hidden chambers and empty halls he found.

The third such place had had the only thing of any note. A chamber that he recognized as being a golemancy enclave. Several of the bodies bore magical injuries that matched up with the story James had told him of his fight with a Golem Amalgamation.

They had been discarded as casually as any bit of refuse outside a tavern's kitchen. Their bodies stank and wept foul putrescence that he sensed even through the minds of his spiders.

And even as the most recent sign of activity he'd found, they were clearly months old and forgotten.

Still.... he had to continue searching.

Because of his distance and his narrowed focus on the task at hand, and because it occurred so close to the surface and under a large city, and also because it didn't occur IN the Deep Dark, but simply near it, in a cellar on the outskirts of the capital, Shil'Varyon'Kai didn't notice the door that burst into existence.

Several small spiders, of limited intelligence on their own, and only tangentially under his control, saw the door but thought nothing of it.

And so the door waited for its purpose.

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"So it's attacking again?" The King asked as he listened to his son's report.

"If I'm honest, I don't know." Artair admitted. "But the damage we saw is the same. The injuries on what few villagers were... still present... were just like the injuries we saw in Jadesport. But on a massive scale."

King Farrick turned to Amina, who was reading reports from the garrisons in the area. "Has it, or they, or anything, been tracked?" He asked.

Amina wobbled her head a bit.

"There's a path." She said hesitantly. "But even with instructions on WHAT to look for; the blight spots, the possessed.... they still haven't found the source. And, whatever it is, it's currently moved either into, or over, the Frakian range. It um.... destroyed a mountain. Apparently."

James, who had been sipping from a cup of coffee as he listened in, struggled to resist spitting it out.

"A mountain?" Kor'Os asked as her jaw dropped open. "How is such a thing possible?"

Amina shook her head. "We don't know. We have a small wing of griffin riders flying over the range to see if any more have fallen. But they're progress is slow. We sent orders not to fly too fast in areas where it's presence is suspected, that way they don't fly into it unexpectedly."

King Farrick rubbed his hands over his face. His kingdom had succumbed to disaster after disaster over the past year, and now another one was moving through and his people couldn't even pinpoint its location.

The rest of the people in the room waited for his word.

"Have the griffin riders accompanied by any arbalestiers we can find in the area and convince to join them." He said after a moment. "Supply them with whatever they need for their smoke shot arrows, preferably with as much color in the smoke as possible."

The other people in the room looked at him curiously.

"Once they're equipped and riding, have the arbalestiers fire the arrows ahead of the griffins every few seconds with smoke already billowing." He continued, and both James and Amina saw where he was going. "If the arrows suddenly disappear it will give them ample warning of incoming blight. Also, ensure that they ride in pairs."

Amina looked to one of the soldiers in the room and the two exchanged nods before the soldier marched out of the room to deliver the message.

Xarina considered the idea and then nodded her own approval. She'd have to try that herself. Of course none of her ships HAD found any seaborne blight yet, so she wasn't hopeful about its necessity.

"Should we go inspect it?" James asked. "I can probably be there in a few days. Week if I go around to be safe."

Amina placed a hand over his and shook her head.

"No." The King said. "Not until we figure out WHERE this.... thing... is." He pointed a stern finger at James. "Besides. You have a bad track record with traveling."

James held up his hands in mock surrender. "Just offering." He said. Then to himself he muttered. "It's just why I'm here in the first place."

"We." Veliry cut in. "Are already setting up to try something that Captain Choi's brother, my assistant Joseph, has come up with. No guarantee. But I think it has merit."

"When will we have an answer?" The King asked.

"The other side of the doorway, like the one we used in the desert, should be there in a day or so." Veliry replied. "After that its simply a matter of sizing up one of the blights and enclosing it."

"And if it does work, what can we expect to see?" The King followed up.

"In theory." She began. "We should be able to MOVE, or at the very least CAPTURE the blight. But like any other experiment; we won't know until we've tried."

"Joey came up with that?" James asked curiously. Veliry nodded. James nodded back with a smile. "Nice."

"Keep me updated." The King said, ignoring James's interjection. "In less serious matters." He nodded to Amina and James. "Not that it isn't serious. The wedding is in five days. Are you two ready?"

"Ye-" Amina began.

"Is that it?" Kor'Os cut her off. She looked at Amina and held her hands up in apology. "Sorry General. Your Majesty." She said to the King in apology. "But that's all? An entire village was wiped out. At least a hundred people dead or missing or.... possessed? And an entire lake drained. A lake that hundreds more people rely upon to live is gone. And that's it?"

Artair looked at her with zero shock. He'd known ever since she'd climbed onto his drake behind him that she was bold. But he did watch his father.

"Do you have an alternative solution Commander?" King Farrick asked, keeping his tone flat. "Because if you do, then you're a step ahead of every mage and scholar under my command, and every scientist from Captain Choi's world. Plus who knows how many people in any of the other kingdoms of this world, since we know some of them have blight patches of their own."

Kor'Os hung her head as she sat back down. She hadn't thought of that.

"I understand your frustration commander. I assure you that I feel the same tenfold." The King said with a weary sigh. "But sadly we haven't figured out an answer, or a preventative measure, for what this thing is capable of. Not yet anyways." He pointed at Veliry. "But we are working on one."

Kor'Os deflated a bit. She'd only come to the capital with the prince because she was certain that the King and his staff had to have some kind of answer for this. But she'd never been foolish enough to think that the King had an answer to EVERYTHING. It had just been a hope, and that hopes loss hurt more than she'd expected.

"Everything that CAN be done to solve this, is being done commander." Amina assured her. "But, and please don't let this slip in public, this particular issue was set upon our world by the gods themselves. It is going to take everything we have to solve it."

James bristled subtly at her side as she mentioned the last bit.

"The gods?" Kor'Os asked softly.

"Indeed." The King said. "I am sorry if that upsets you commander. But to the best of our knowledge it is true."

"Well then...." She began. "What CAN we do? Sir?" She asked.

Everyone in the room donned looks of concern and discomfort, even the King.

"We can prepare." James said before anyone else could. "At Jadesport we turned the possessed back. Veliry and my brother are gonna do what they can. So are the other mages. But for the rest of us it's just a matter of prepping as best as we can and hoping we make it through."

He looked at King Farrick, who nodded his approval.

"You're a scout right?" James asked. Kor'Os nodded. "Think you can track something that doesn't like to be seen?"

"Haven't had to in years." She admitted. "But I was one of the top hunters during the last Chamex swarm in the north." She looked at Artair. "Your former Clan mother was one of the few who outscored me."

Artair arched an eyebrow. "That was nasty hunting." He said. "But a good match for this I suppose."

"Think you can find whatever's doing this?" James asked, not wanting to think of Gixelle, who'd been like a big sister to him. "Especially with all the intel we have here in the castle about it."

Kor'Os looked at Amina, who nodded and handed over some of the scrolls and a map. Kor'Os turned away the map in favor of her own though. It was better notated for the area in question.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/107sd2y/wait_is_this_just_gate_291/)

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But slicing HER hadn't been the objective, and he smiled as she raised the weapon to her shoulder to fire, and only heard a light click.

James's smile grew as she looked at the weapon in confusion as she realized that he'd cut the string with a small dagger in his off hand.

Then he spun and was blasting back toward her, both blades out.

To his surprise, she dropped the crossbow and drew a pair of cutlasses that shone and shimmered with heat as they left their scabbards.

She touched the pommels of the two blades together and green hued flames sprang to life around the blades as she moved them into a spin, her own eyes beginning to glow in the same color as James's.

The crowd Oohed at the sight, and many of the sailors present began cheering loudly.

He, was going to lose this fight if he tried to stick to blades.

His sword had other ideas.

James felt it tug at his hand and he let go of it, knowing that it would defend him by any means necessary.

Then, as her swords flashed out to intercept him, James blasted with the hand that had been holding it and directed himself into a long slide in the dirt.

Xarina's eyes widened a bit as she realized what was happening.

Her blades met his with a loud clatter as the three magical weapons competed to protect their wielders.

Then, just under and between the three of them, James's wolf hand flashed forward and slammed into the woman's leather padded sternum like a hammer.

Princess Xarina flew backwards, leaving one of her swords behind to fall in the dirt as the flames on its blade guttered out.

The crowd around the ring went silent as the woman slid to just under a pair of her sailors.

"Fuck." She gasped as she caught her breath. "That hurt."

"He punched the Cap'n's soul out of her!" One of the sailors somewhere else yelled with a laugh.

As Xarina picked herself up she muttered. "Treon you're on cleaning duty for that."

"Worth it!" The same voice answered.

Then Xarina broke out into a smile and the gathered crowd erupted into cheers and laughter as the two sailors she'd landed next to lifted her up onto her feet.

The whole time she'd been laying there James had simply stayed in the half seated position that he'd been in when he'd punched her. He'd won, but he was still exhausted.

"Good enough?" He asked as he stood up and offered his hand to the short woman.

She flicked her dropped blade up into the air with the one still in her hand, then sheathed them both. James couldn't help but notice that the ground underneath where the blade had rested was scorched black.

"Ha!" She laughed as she took the hand. "Aye, you can still marry my sister." She said, causing James to don a look of confusion. "Didn't think you could actually fly. Guess I was wrong. Weird way to do it

though." She dusted some of the dirt off her hands as the men from the crowd began to jostle James with claps on the back.

Then a bottle of something that tasted like brake cleaner, grape kool-aid, and shoe polish was pressed to James's lips and he was being shuffled off with a bunch of sailors who were cheering his impromptu victory.

Amina didn't hear him call out to her as he sputtered from the vile concoction.

"Told you he'd win." Amina said smugly as she stepped up next to her sister, who was rubbing at the spot on her chest where she'd been punched.

"I shoulda known that someone who trained with you wouldn't exactly be an easy match." Xarina replied. Then she grunted as she tried taking a deep breath. "Think Treon's right though. Pretty sure he actually punched the damn soul out of me."

"Saves me having to do it myself." Amina said with a grin.

The two sisters stood in amiable silence for a moment as they watched the cohort of sailors, a handful of Amina's soldiers, and James flood into the castle. To the dining hall they assumed.

Then Xarina began laughing, and a few moments later Amina joined.

Xarina wrapped an arm around Amina's waist and hugged her. "Good to see you sis. He's a good'n."

"That he is." Amina agreed.

"When's Ferria get here?"

"You'd know better." Amina replied. "She has to sail here. Unless her husband is going to finally use this as a chance to show of these 'sky-ships' or 'sky barges' whatever the Vatrian government is calling them now." She rolled her eyes at the idea. "But her last letter said she should be here any day now."

"And the brothers?" Xarina wondered.

"Oh, well you know Alixan. He'll show up last minute and make a show of it. Probably riding a new griffin or something." Then she shook her head. "Artair is actually very nearly here already."

As if on cue, the doors to the courtyard opened, and a large drake with a familiar rider on top came striding through. Next to Artair and Xhalya was a horse with a young orc scout on it.

"Speak of the deep." Xarina said.

She made to move toward her brother, but Amina's hand landed on her shoulder and stopped her.

Xarina looked back curiously.

"Remember the task father gave you a few years back?" Amina asked, her tone serious. "Looking for blights while at sea?"

"Yeah." Xarina answered. "Why?"

Amina nodded at Artair and his traveling companion as they approached.

"We've got problems." She said grimly.

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Vickers looked around at the solid metal bars that layered over the walls of the room he was in, and knew that they were made of silver, or at least coated it in.

"Sebastien Anthony Vickers of Earth." The old fox faced were-folk said from the other side of the cage's door. They wore the white with green trim of the Lunar Council's elders. "You have requested conversion into a member of the Folk. That request has been approved. You have had time to think over the selections we have given you, and ask questions of those we have brought with us. The kind you have chosen is ready. Are you?"

Vickers looked at the other rooms nearby, each of which also had the metal bar doors like his. Almost all of them were also occupied, and simply awaiting the same confirmation.

He looked down at his body, naked except for a pair of spandex boxers that he wore whenever he was planning on being active. He hoped they would hold up to what was about to happen.

This was the last time his body would look like this.

His scars would disappear.

His tattoos, few as they were, would simply be patches of slightly different colored fur.

Given time, the damage to his intestines, gifts from a Thai dam-breaker who'd shot him nearly a decade before, would eventually repair. Especially if he got injured there again.

He looked at the little triangle scar near his thumb again.

Then he looked back at the fox man again, and nodded.

Atrafar, standing behind the man, closed her eyes and nodded too. Then she turned and gestured to the man who would turn Vickers.

Jaegheri stepped up to the door. Vickers still couldn't believe that a person who was part jaguar also had a name like that. But for now, such curious coincidences had to simply be chalked up to bad luck.

"Arm." The were-jaguar said.

Vickers thrust his arm out between two of the bars.

The man grabbed it with his hands and turned it slightly.

"This will hurt." He said in a serious tone. "And the bite shall be the least of it."

"I can handle it." Vickers said softly.

"They all say that." Jaegheri said with a look of sorrow.

"Then let's get to it and find out." Vickers said with a grin.

Behind Jaegheri, Atrafar grimaced at the bravado. Then she and the elder moved on to the next door.

Before Vickers could say anything more Jaegheri bent down and he felt the man's wickedly long, sharp teeth pierce into his arm.

For a moment, he thought the were-jaguar wasn't going to let go, and if anything was going to bite harder, as he felt the pressure increase for a moment. He knew that the man could shatter the limb with the strength of his jaw alone if he wanted to.

But instead Jaegheri released him, and spat the blood in his mouth out onto the straw and sawdust that was spread upon the ground.

Vickers pulled his arm back into the cage as blood gushed from the punctures in his forearm.

"Shit." He said as he tried to staunch the bleeding. It wasn't arterial, he knew that much. But it still gushed much more rapidly than he thought it should.

Then something popped in the arm, and Vickers felt cold fire course through his veins.

His hand flexed as something, he thought it might have been a muscle, made a long tearing noise and his thumb bent almost backwards. As he looked the nails lengthened into long, slightly hooked, points.

The skin around the bite wound burned as it darkened. Then a fine fuzz of dark brown, bordering on black, hair erupted in a volume the skin had never known before.

Vickers' jaw clenched as he fought back the urge to scream, and as it clenched it grew. It became longer, wider, more pronounced. His gums split and bled and healed within moments as his teeth shattered or else

fell out of his mouth and were replaced by larger, sharper, pointed teeth.

He was about to reach up to try to inspect his mouth with the hand of his un-bitten arm. But instead he fell forward as his left leg made a noise he had only ever heard bones make when they were hit by blunt objects in fights.

The pain of his bones rearranging themselves took him over his limit, and for the first time in years, Vickers screamed in pain.

"Good luck new brother." Jaegheri said softly as he gave the cage door one last shake, checking to see if it was locked one last time, and then walked over near the other applicant who had requested to join his kind.

There was a tearing noise as Vickers' skin split from the rapid growth of new muscle, and he screamed again as he thrashed and rolled about on the floor of the caged room.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (292/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/107sbfq/wait_is_this_just_gate_291/) /
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James's smile grew as she looked at the weapon in confusion as she realized that he'd cut the string with a small dagger in his off hand.

Then he spun and was blasting back toward her, both blades out.

To his surprise, she dropped the crossbow and drew a pair of cutlasses that shone and shimmered with heat as they left their scabbards.

She touched the pommels of the two blades together and green hued flames sprang to life around the blades as she moved them into a spin, her own eyes beginning to glow in the same color as James's.

The crowd Oohed at the sight, and many of the sailors present began cheering loudly.

He, was going to lose this fight if he tried to stick to blades.

His sword had other ideas.

James felt it tug at his hand and he let go of it, knowing that it would defend him by any means necessary.

Then, as her swords flashed out to intercept him, James blasted with the hand that had been holding it and directed himself into a long slide in the dirt.

Xarina's eyes widened a bit as she realized what was happening.

Her blades met his with a loud clatter as the three magical weapons competed to protect their wielders.

Then, just under and between the three of them, James's wolf hand flashed forward and slammed into the woman's leather padded sternum like a hammer.

Princess Xarina flew backwards, leaving one of her swords behind to fall in the dirt as the flames on its blade guttered out.

The crowd around the ring went silent as the woman slid to just under a pair of her sailors.

"Fuck." She gasped as she caught her breath. "That hurt."

"He punched the Cap'n's soul out of her!" One of the sailors somewhere else yelled with a laugh.

As Xarina picked herself up she muttered. "Treon you're on cleaning duty for that."

"Worth it!" The same voice answered.

Then Xarina broke out into a smile and the gathered crowd erupted into cheers and laughter as the two sailors she'd landed next to lifted her up onto her feet.

The whole time she'd been laying there James had simply stayed in the half seated position that he'd been in when he'd punched her. He'd won, but he was still exhausted.

"Good enough?" He asked as he stood up and offered his hand to the short woman.

She flicked her dropped blade up into the air with the one still in her hand, then sheathed them both. James couldn't help but notice that the ground underneath where the blade had rested was scorched black.

"Ha!" She laughed as she took the hand. "Aye, you can still marry my sister." She said, causing James to don a look of confusion. "Didn't think you could actually fly. Guess I was wrong. Weird way to do it though." She dusted some of the dirt off her hands as the men from the crowd began to jostle James with claps on the back.

Then a bottle of something that tasted like brake cleaner, grape kool-aid, and shoe polish was pressed to James's lips and he was being shuffled off with a bunch of sailors who were cheering his impromptu victory.

Amina didn't hear him call out to her as he sputtered from the vile concoction.

"Told you he'd win." Amina said smugly as she stepped up next to her sister, who was rubbing at the spot on her chest where she'd been punched.

"I shoulda known that someone who trained with you wouldn't exactly be an easy match." Xarina replied. Then she grunted as she tried taking a deep breath. "Think Treon's right though. Pretty sure he actually punched the damn soul out of me."

"Saves me having to do it myself." Amina said with a grin.

The two sisters stood in amiable silence for a moment as they watched the cohort of sailors, a handful of Amina's soldiers, and James flood into the castle. To the dining hall they assumed.

Then Xarina began laughing, and a few moments later Amina joined.

Xarina wrapped an arm around Amina's waist and hugged her. "Good to see you sis. He's a good'n."

"That he is." Amina agreed.

"When's Ferria get here?"

"You'd know better." Amina replied. "She has to sail here. Unless her husband is going to finally use this as a chance to show of these 'sky-ships' or 'sky barges' whatever the Vatrian government is calling them now." She rolled her eyes at the idea. "But her last letter said she should be here any day now."

"And the brothers?" Xarina wondered.

"Oh, well you know Alixan. He'll show up last minute and make a show of it. Probably riding a new griffin or something." Then she shook her head. "Artair is actually very nearly here already."

As if on cue, the doors to the courtyard opened, and a large drake with a familiar rider on top came striding through. Next to Artair and Xhalya was a horse with a young orc scout on it.

"Speak of the deep." Xarina said.

She made to move toward her brother, but Amina's hand landed on her shoulder and stopped her.

Xarina looked back curiously.

"Remember the task father gave you a few years back?" Amina asked, her tone serious. "Looking for blights while at sea?"

"Yeah." Xarina answered. "Why?"

Amina nodded at Artair and his traveling companion as they approached.

"We've got problems." She said grimly.

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Vickers looked around at the solid metal bars that layered over the walls of the room he was in, and knew that they were made of silver, or at least coated it in.

"Sebastien Anthony Vickers of Earth." The old fox faced were-folk said from the other side of the cage's door. They wore the white with green trim of the Lunar Council's elders. "You have requested conversion into a member of the Folk. That request has been approved. You have had time to think over the selections we have given you, and ask questions of those we have brought with us. The kind you have chosen is ready. Are you?"

Vickers looked at the other rooms nearby, each of which also had the metal bar doors like his. Almost all of them were also occupied, and simply awaiting the same confirmation.

He looked down at his body, naked except for a pair of spandex boxers that he wore whenever he was planning on being active. He hoped they would hold up to what was about to happen.

This was the last time his body would look like this.

His scars would disappear.

His tattoos, few as they were, would simply be patches of slightly different colored fur.

Given time, the damage to his intestines, gifts from a Thai dam-breaker who'd shot him nearly a decade before, would eventually repair. Especially if he got injured there again.

He looked at the little triangle scar near his thumb again.

Then he looked back at the fox man again, and nodded.

Atrafar, standing behind the man, closed her eyes and nodded too. Then she turned and gestured to the man who would turn Vickers.

Jaegheri stepped up to the door. Vickers still couldn't believe that a person who was part jaguar also had a name like that. But for now, such curious coincidences had to simply be chalked up to bad luck.

"Arm." The were-jaguar said.

Vickers thrust his arm out between two of the bars.

The man grabbed it with his hands and turned it slightly.

"This will hurt." He said in a serious tone. "And the bite shall be the least of it."

"I can handle it." Vickers said softly.

"They all say that." Jaegheri said with a look of sorrow.

"Then let's get to it and find out." Vickers said with a grin.

Behind Jaegheri, Atrafar grimaced at the bravado. Then she and the elder moved on to the next door.

Before Vickers could say anything more Jaegheri bent down and he felt the man's wickedly long, sharp teeth pierce into his arm.

For a moment, he thought the were-jaguar wasn't going to let go, and if anything was going to bite harder, as he felt the pressure increase for a moment. He knew that the man could shatter the limb with the strength of his jaw alone if he wanted to.

But instead Jaegheri released him, and spat the blood in his mouth out onto the straw and sawdust that was spread upon the ground.

Vickers pulled his arm back into the cage as blood gushed from the punctures in his forearm.

"Shit." He said as he tried to staunch the bleeding. It wasn't arterial, he knew that much. But it still gushed much more rapidly than he thought it should.

Then something popped in the arm, and Vickers felt cold fire course through his veins.

His hand flexed as something, he thought it might have been a muscle, made a long tearing noise and his thumb bent almost backwards. As he looked the nails lengthened into long, slightly hooked, points.

The skin around the bite wound burned as it darkened. Then a fine fuzz of dark brown, bordering on black, hair erupted in a volume the skin had never known before.

Vickers' jaw clenched as he fought back the urge to scream, and as it clenched it grew. It became longer, wider, more pronounced. His gums split and bled and healed within moments as his teeth shattered or else fell out of his mouth and were replaced by larger, sharper, pointed teeth.

He was about to reach up to try to inspect his mouth with the hand of his un-bitten arm. But instead he fell forward as his left leg made a noise

he had only ever heard bones make when they were hit by blunt objects in fights.

The pain of his bones rearranging themselves took him over his limit, and for the first time in years, Vickers screamed in pain.

"Good luck new brother." Jaegheri said softly as he gave the cage door one last shake, checking to see if it was locked one last time, and then walked over near the other applicant who had requested to join his kind.

There was a tearing noise as Vickers' skin split from the rapid growth of new muscle, and he screamed again as he thrashed and rolled about on the floor of the caged room.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/109gs9n/wait_is_this_just_gate_293/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (291/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zzcmec/wait_is_this_just_gate_290/)

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Additionally; Amina's sister looked nothing like any of the other three siblings James had met.

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After seeing a portrait of their mother, who had passed away when they were all children, James had been able to see where they'd gotten their

looks from. To put it simply, Queen Xhalyanna Petravius was beautiful, and significantly taller than her husband the King.

But Xarina Petravius, the second daughter and fourth child of the Petravius family, had clearly taken her looks from her father.

When James first met her, in the courtyard of the castle, he had initially thought she was a dwarf.

She was shorter than he was. She was plump, though it was hard to tell under the old fashioned ship's captain uniform she was wearing. He suspected that she was more muscular than the outfit let on. And she had black curly hair that hung around her head in a style that reminded James of the styles he'd seen people wearing in old shows from the sixties and seventies. Her skin was deeply tanned and she had a scar that ran from the corner of her mouth almost all the way to her ear.

And.... she was very loud.

James looked at Amina curiously as the ragtag party of sailors staggered their way through the courtyard, harassing the soldiers as they passed and weaving about haphazardly.

Amina was beaming with a smile.

"AMINA!" The stocky woman exclaimed with her arms held out in the multiversal gesture for a hug.

"Xa!" Amina yelled back as she embraced the shorter woman. She grunted as her sister lifter her up off the ground and squeezed her in a display of strength that surprised James. "Every time." She wheezed as she was lowered to the ground and held her sister at arms length.

"Well I only see ya 'bout once every few years ya damnable work horse." Xarina said with a slam of her fist into Amina's breastplate. "Gotta make the hugs memorable."

"Well maybe if you came in off the ocean from time to time I'd see you more often." Amina countered as she ruffled her sister's hair, which seemed to upset her, even if only a little. "I spent damn near a month in Jadesport working with YOUR merchants. Don't act like you couldn't have stopped by."

"Pah!" Xarina spat. "I was on the other side of the ocean dealing with the runt's religious nuts." She shook her head in mock disgust. "Bunch of glow kelp addicts." She added.

"Yeah. I'll bet." Amina said sarcastically.

James just smiled and nodded at the sailors that passed by. Feeling like a third wheel.

"This him?" Xarina asked suddenly, breaking him out of his awkward silence. "This the so-called Hero?"

"Hi." James said, holding his hand out for a shake.

The hand was slapped away suddenly and James felt himself being crushed and lifted in the same way Amina had only moments before.

"You're smaller than I expected. But thank the gods someone finally got this one to think about a sword that aint made of steel for a change." She said, surprising James with the crudeness of the joke even as he gasped for breath. "It's about time she found a man worth a damn."

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"She fucking did it again!" She spat suddenly. "Every time!" She said. Then she groaned and flexed her hands as if she wanted to strangle something. Then she took a deep breath as she steadied herself.

"Hon?" James asked nervously. "You.... okay?"

Amina took a moment longer to calm herself.

"Yes." She said sharply, as if trying to convince herself too. "Yes I'm fine." She took another deep breath. "That went better than normal." She said. "Come on. We'll need to redirect her AWAY from the wine room."

"Ooookay." James said and began following his fiance as she stormed off trailing her sister.

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The human hand.

The hand that WOULDN'T be human much longer.

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Would it still be there once he'd transformed?

"Too late for second guessing." He muttered to himself as he stepped forward.

The door opened before he had a chance to knock.

Atrafar stood on the other side, looking minutely less wolfen than the last time he'd seen her. She was wearing her ceremonial armor. It's gauntlets had had their spiked, silver, fingers lengthened and sharpened compared to what they normally looked like.

"Ready?" She asked. "This is your last chance to back out."

Vickers didn't speak. Instead he simply nodded and stepped through the door.

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Samantha sat in the small courtyard near the hospital's cafeteria with her hood drawn down tight over her face.

She jittered nervously as Dr. Munro approached with the tray of food in her hands and set it down on the table between them.

"How is it?" She asked as she sat down opposite of Samantha and grabbed a small bowl with what looked like chowder in it. "It's been a while since you were outside."

Samantha inhaled deeply, the end of her snout only inches away from a bowl that, to her at least, reeked of ham and chilies. No, she realized as she inhaled, it was only chili powder. How she could tell the difference she didn't know. But she could.

"Too many smells." She said as she covered her nose and fought off a sneeze. "Too much sound. Even here." Her left ear twitched as a car honked somewhere.

Normally she wouldn't have been able to hear that from inside a place like this. After all, the small courtyard was surrounded on all sides by the hospital. But her new senses, even halfway through her transformation like now, were stronger than she'd realized before she'd been brought here.

"Is it overwhelming you?" The doctor asked as she blew on a spoon of the soup. "We can go back inside if you'd like."

Samantha shook her head.

"No." She said. "It'd just be worse in the cafeteria. Besides, grass and trees smell better than hospital hallways. Even if I can still smell those too."

Doctor Munro simply nodded. The dislike of a hospital's scent wasn't exactly a revelation, though she hadn't considered how much worse it must have been for her patient now that she was smelling something different.

"And the noise?" She asked. "I can't imagine that this place is worse than inside." She mused as she looked around.

"It's not.... It's not bad." Samantha answered. "And the cafeteria was much louder, even in the few moments I was in there. But..." She looked around, peering out from under her hood for a moment as she looked about. "That tree has a birds nest in it. Birds haven't been pushed out just yet." She looked up and out at the small bit of sky visible above. "I can hear the cars out in the parking lot. And the reporters near the main entrance. It's.... It's like a dull roar of noise... all of it at once."

"But not overwhelming?" The doctor repeated. When Samantha shook her head again she followed up. "Tell me about the birds."

Samantha looked at her curiously. "The birds?" She wondered.

"Yes." Doctor Munro confirmed. "You said there's some birds in a nest. Which tree? How many?"

Samantha's eyebrows furrowed, then she looked the direction of the noise she'd heard.

It was difficult to narrow down her focus. Someone somewhere in the cafeteria was laughing at a joke with way too much volume. Someone was yelling at someone in Spanish on the second floor somewhere behind her. Plus she could still smell the soup setting in front of her.

"Take your time." Doctor Munro said softly. "There's not time limit on any of this. We can sit here all day. There's always more soup."

Samantha put the bowl to her mouth and drank it down in defiance of the statement. The plan backfired as her elongated snout made a mess of the attempt.

"Or you can do that." The doctor said with only mild smugness.

Samantha ignored her in favor of focusing on the task at hand.

It took a few minutes, but eventually she managed to hone in on the nest. She pointed at the tree in question, even as she continued focusing.

"That.... elm?" She said uncertainly. "I don't know trees."

Doctor Munro let out a light laugh. "That's fine." She said. "Now how many?"

THAT was a significantly tougher question. Samantha had no idea how many there were in there. Maybe if she knew what kind of birds they were she might have an answer. But even then, she didn't really know a lot about birds either.

She focused even harder. And as she did, she didn't even notice the way the rest of the world seemed to fall away.

She heard the cheeping and twittering of the young birds. Heard their little clawed feet scraping and rustling in the nest. Heard one of them peck at some part of it with its little beak.

Then as she focused even harder, her eyes shut to keep distractions at a minimum, she began to hear subtle little differences in the noises.

One of the birds was just a tiny bit deeper than the others. It wasn't even a full octave, but it was a difference.

Two of the birds were almost cheeping on top of each other, but their notes were almost identical, and she could hear the two of them.

Then there was the one that was continuously pecking at something. Maybe some left over food or something. Or maybe it was just the bird equivalent of scratching graffiti into your desk.

"Four.... I think." She said hesitantly.

Doctor Munro wiped her mouth with a napkin and stood up, walking over to the tree quietly. Samantha watched her curiously. After a few moments the doctor stood on tiptoes and pressed her phone into a small nook on the tree.

"Sorry little ones." She said softly, though Samantha heard it as clearly as if she was still at the table. Then there was a small snapshot noise as she took a picture with the phone.

She looked at it for a moment, then nodded and walked back over and handed her the phone.

"Five?" Samantha asked, a little upset at being wrong.

"I think the one in the back is sleeping." The doctor said. "Or dead. But I imagine the parents would have gotten rid of it if that was the case."

Then the doctor placed a hand on Samantha's shoulder, pulling her focus back to her.

"Did you hear what I said while you were trying to figure it out?" She asked.

Samantha thought about it, then shook her head as she handed the phone back.

"I said.... this adjustment will be easier once you get used to it." The doctor said with a smile. "I whispered it. But still." She held the phone up with the picture still on display. "Far as I'm concerned that's a pass. And a big step."

Samantha grinned a bit as she looked over at the tree. She'd really HEARD the difference between a bunch of birds from almost twenty yards away. It was just another item on a long list of things that never should have been possible for her. But she'd done it.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/108pm57/wait_is_this_just_gate_292/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (291/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zzckqh/wait_is_this_just_gate_290/) /
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"And the noise?" She asked. "I can't imagine that this place is worse than inside." She mused as she looked around.

"It's not.... It's not bad." Samantha answered. "And the cafeteria was much louder, even in the few moments I was in there. But..." She looked around, peering out from under her hood for a moment as she looked about. "That tree has a birds nest in it. Birds haven't been pushed out just yet." She looked up and out at the small bit of sky visible above. "I can hear the cars out in the parking lot. And the reporters near the main entrance. It's.... It's like a dull roar of noise... all of it at once."

"But not overwhelming?" The doctor repeated. When Samantha shook her head again she followed up. "Tell me about the birds."

Samantha looked at her curiously. "The birds?" She wondered.

"Yes." Doctor Munro confirmed. "You said there's some birds in a nest. Which tree? How many?"

Samantha's eyebrows furrowed, then she looked the direction of the noise she'd heard.

It was difficult to narrow down her focus. Someone somewhere in the cafeteria was laughing at a joke with way too much volume. Someone was yelling at someone in Spanish on the second floor somewhere behind her. Plus she could still smell the soup setting in front of her.

"Take your time." Doctor Munro said softly. "There's not time limit on any of this. We can sit here all day. There's always more soup."

Samantha put the bowl to her mouth and drank it down in defiance of the statement. The plan backfired as her elongated snout made a mess of the attempt.

"Or you can do that." The doctor said with only mild smugness.

Samantha ignored her in favor of focusing on the task at hand.

It took a few minutes, but eventually she managed to hone in on the nest. She pointed at the tree in question, even as she continued focusing.

"That.... elm?" She said uncertainly. "I don't know trees."

Doctor Munro let out a light laugh. "That's fine." She said. "Now how many?"

THAT was a significantly tougher question. Samantha had no idea how many there were in there. Maybe if she knew what kind of birds they were she might have an answer. But even then, she didn't really know a lot about birds either.

She focused even harder. And as she did, she didn't even notice the way the rest of the world seemed to fall away.

She heard the cheeping and twittering of the young birds. Heard their little clawed feet scraping and rustling in the nest. Heard one of them peck at some part of it with its little beak.

Then as she focused even harder, her eyes shut to keep distractions at a minimum, she began to hear subtle little differences in the noises.

One of the birds was just a tiny bit deeper than the others. It wasn't even a full octave, but it was a difference.

Two of the birds were almost cheeping on top of each other, but their notes were almost identical, and she could hear the two of them.

Then there was the one that was continuously pecking at something. Maybe some left over food or something. Or maybe it was just the bird equivalent of scratching graffiti into your desk.

"Four.... I think." She said hesitantly.

Doctor Munro wiped her mouth with a napkin and stood up, walking over to the tree quietly. Samantha watched her curiously. After a few moments the doctor stood on tiptoes and pressed her phone into a small nook on the tree.

"Sorry little ones." She said softly, though Samantha heard it as clearly as if she was still at the table. Then there was a small snapshot noise as she took a picture with the phone.

She looked at it for a moment, then nodded and walked back over and handed her the phone.

"Five?" Samantha asked, a little upset at being wrong.

"I think the one in the back is sleeping." The doctor said. "Or dead. But I imagine the parents would have gotten rid of it if that was the case."

Then the doctor placed a hand on Samantha's shoulder, pulling her focus back to her.

"Did you hear what I said while you were trying to figure it out?" She asked.

Samantha thought about it, then shook her head as she handed the phone back.

"I said.... this adjustment will be easier once you get used to it." The doctor said with a smile. "I whispered it. But still." She held the phone up with the picture still on display. "Far as I'm concerned that's a pass. And a big step."

Samantha grinned a bit as she looked over at the tree. She'd really HEARD the difference between a bunch of birds from almost twenty yards away. It was just another item on a long list of things that never should have been possible for her. But she'd done it.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/108pkku/wait_is_this_just_gate_292/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=android_app&utm_name=androidcss&utm_term=1&utm_content=share_button)

Wait, is this just GATE? (290/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zyjced/wait_is_this_just_gate_289/)

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The capital showed scars of the intense violence that had occurred just in the previous winter. Buildings had been repaired. But many of them still showed bits of burn damage and had soot and ash stains. Others easily showed where the damage had been repaired with new beams, or roofing, mixed in with the old that had been salvaged.

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to rebuild their temple in the original location. Not only was that location slagged to glass even to this day, but the priests had (correctly) determined that doing so would leave a bad taste in people's mouths. Their new building was a much smaller, much humbler building on the northeast side of the capital now. The priests there had taken to wearing thin rags throughout the rebuilding effort, forgoing their own comfort as they tended to the displaced refugees from the attack. A show of humility and self inflicted punishment for an event that many people throughout the city had seen as their fault, though the arch-mages had thought otherwise.

James couldn't help but notice how Amina's head shifted from one shoulder to the other as they neared the glass crater that had marked the elemental's emergence, moving so she wouldn't have to look at it.

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"I think they'll be okay." He said softly, mostly to himself.

"Hmm?" Amina wondered as she looked at the houses nearby.

"The people." James answered. "I think they'll be okay."

Amina pulled back a bit and looked at the children for just a moment before turning back the other way.

"Not all of them." She said glumly.

"Not about all of them." He countered as he looked back toward the direction they were heading.

They rode in silence for a few moments.

"Did I tell you about L.A.?" He asked as he broke the silence.

"The city that got destroyed?" She asked. He nodded. "A little bit. Why?"

"I told you about how me and my unit got transported through it on a train once, right?" He asked.

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"Even in that destroyed city, there were people." He continued. "Not many. And they didn't live good lives. But they were there. Even amidst all that horror and sadness... That.... oppressive.... aura. So thick you could FEEL it.... even without any magic involved. And they were in there living."

She listened silently. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the playing children.

"This place will do better." He said. "It's hurt." He placed his wolf hand on her head and rustled her hair a bit. "WE... are hurt. That'll never change. But.... This place will heal."

She remained silent, and a few minutes later they reached their destination.

Amina slid down Steve's side silently as James lent her her hand.

Kela and Jurl's house, now only Jurl's, looked much like most of the city did. The side of it closest to the Elemental's attack had been blasted away from the wind and heat, and the remaining half of the house had collapsed partially as a result. When they'd finally found them after the battle, they'd learned that Jurl and the two children had hidden down in their wine cellar.

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Sitting in the corner of the yard was a young willow tree, maybe a year old at most, with a small stone marker at its base. James remembered Kela talking about getting a willow tree from a druid friend of hers that had ended up being turned into a Blight Possessed outside of Jadesport.

James and Amina could both guess at what the marker was for.

The door opened as they approached, startling both of them, and a small, furry, child poked their head out.

"Aunt Amina?" Little Tilo asked as he emerged fully.

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"Hey Tilo." She said as she hugged him. "Is your father home?"

Tilo nodded.

"Well we stopped by to invite you guys to our wedding." She said as she lifted the little pup up onto her hip. "Can you go get him for us?"

Tilo nodded again. But before Amina could put him back down, Jurl pulled the door open all the way.

"No need." He said. "I'm already here."

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But, he and Veliry HAD managed to come to an understanding of how they would work together in the future.

And..... Joey had also admitted that he had a crush on her.

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"Josephito?" His mother's voice inquired.

Joey looked up to see her approaching him in a bit of a rush.

He willed his eyes to dispel the magic within them.

"Mom?" He asked as the glow faded.

"Joey are you okay?" She asked as she approached and cautiously put a hand on his shoulder. "One of the healers mentioned seeing you in some kind of distress. What's going on?"

Joey smiled. "Nothing mom." He reassured her. "I'm fine. Just... working through some stuff."

His mother studied him for a moment. Then, when she didn't sense any lies she matched the smile.

"What was going on with your eyes? What spell was that?" She asked curiously as she lightly pulled him back into motion.

"Just a trick James showed me." He answered. "And it helps a lot with the uh... overload."

"That's wonderful." She said. "I thought you'd quit magic."

"I have." He said. "But only LEARNING magic. I can't UNLEARN what I already have, but I think I'll keep using this one."

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"Oh, only about six months or so." He said easily. "It was still winter."

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"Commander." The soldier greeted, causing the other soldiers with him to perk up.

"Relax." She said as she returned the salute. "I'm not even your garrison." Then she decided to annoy her traveling companion. "I'm from the Riverland Garrison traveling with the second prince here." She gestured at Artair, who fought not to look upset as he showed them the ring dangling from his neck. If the soldiers had perked up before, now they were standing practically ramrod straight. "We've sent message ahead, we need to report in."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/107sd2y/wait_is_this_just_gate_291/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zyjaw7/wait_is_this_just_gate_289/) /
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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/107sbfq/wait_is_this_just_gate_291/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (289/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zxpccg/wait_is_this_just_gate_288/)

Writer's note: For all his good qualities, James is still a sarcastic ass about some things.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina were having lunch, discussing the upcoming wedding, when Vickers caught up with them.

"-so yes, Father has already arranged the invitations. From what I understand my sister is quite cross with him about it. Something about the tides or something." Amina said before taking a sip from her tea cup.

Vickers plopped down on one of the spare seats at the table they were sitting at.

"Sup Vickers?" James asked curiously as he recovered the piece of smeplie that the unexpected arrival had shocked out of his hand. "Everything good?"

"Yeah man." Vickers said as he reached over and snagged a grape off of James's plate, prompting a short lived scowl. "Just stopped by to let you know that I'm gonna be unavailable for a few days starting on..." He checked his watch to see what day it was back on Earth. "Thursday."

"Yeah?" James asked curiously. "What's going on?"

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"That easy?" The SEAL asked, surprised at the immediate approval.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (289/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zxpajg/wait_is_this_just_gate_288/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: For all his good qualities, James is still a sarcastic ass about some things.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina were having lunch, discussing the upcoming wedding, when Vickers caught up with them.

"-so yes, Father has already arranged the invitations. From what I understand my sister is quite cross with him about it. Something about the tides or something." Amina said before taking a sip from her tea cup.

Vickers plopped down on one of the spare seats at the table they were sitting at.

"Sup Vickers?" James asked curiously as he recovered the piece of smeplie that the unexpected arrival had shocked out of his hand. "Everything good?"

"Yeah man." Vickers said as he reached over and snagged a grape off of James's plate, prompting a short lived scowl. "Just stopped by to let you know that I'm gonna be unavailable for a few days starting on..." He checked his watch to see what day it was back on Earth. "Thursday."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zzckqh/wait_is_this_just_gate_290/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (288/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zwvbhr/wait_is_this_just_gate_287/)

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"I can't." The healer admitted. "But several of the Lead Healers can. It's a difficult skill."

The doctor nodded absently.

The examination ended some ten minutes or so later, each healer writing down detailed reports of the various bodily functions they'd examined with their different magical sights and comparing them to the knowledge

that the doctor and nurse had, as well as what was in the medical textbook.

Werner waited with bated breath as they discussed what they'd seen.

Finally the doctor and nurse, as well as the senior healer present, walked over with smiles.

"Good news Ambassador." Said the doctor. "I think... that once Nurse Choi and myself get better acquainted with magic, we should be able to do something about your condition."

"Really?" She asked, not sure if she believed it or not. "You can fix this?"

The doctor's face didn't change from happiness, but it did gain a slight... tempering.

"Well. I don't know about CURING it." She said, and Werner felt her heart drop. "BUT.... I do think we can undo the damage that has been caused so far. And in the future should be able to repeat that process as often as needed to prevent the disease from killing you."

For the first time in almost eight years, Werner felt genuine hope about her condition.

"So.... you can.... fix me?" She asked nervously. "Reset my brain back to the way it was? Back... before I had any symptoms?"

The doctor nodded, and the nurse see-sawed her hand a bit.

"Yes and no." Said the doctor. "It's not so much resetting it. We'd be working with a mage that... um..." She turned to the healer. "How did you explain it?"

The healer smiled. "A memory mage." She said. "They will help us maintain your mind's knowledge and memory while we reconstruct the damaged.... New-Rons?" She said hesitantly.

"Neurons, yes." The doctor confirmed. "Anyways. We should be able to reverse the damage. Then, whenever your symptoms return we should be able to simply.... do it again. We'll have to write down the whole process though, since that would likely take years. Or you know, ideally it would anyways."

Werner thought of the countless, vacuum packed and UV shielded packs of pills she had with her in her room, that she had to take every day just to combat the symptoms. The ones she had taken for years in increasingly strong doses.

The thought of not needing them, even if only temporarily, brought tears to her eyes.

"How.... How soon can we do this?" She asked.

The three people in front of her looked at each other for a moment.

"As soon as we get trained up enough." Nurse DeLaRosa said with a reassuring hand on Werner's shoulder.

She gulped. "Can you maybe take some night courses or something?" She asked with a laugh.

The doctor smiled. "To help a patient?" She asked. "Gladly."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zyjced/wait_is_this_just_gate_289/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (288/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zwva0s/wait_is_this_just_gate_287/) /
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The examination ended some ten minutes or so later, each healer writing down detailed reports of the various bodily functions they'd examined with their different magical sights and comparing them to the knowledge that the doctor and nurse had, as well as what was in the medical textbook.

Werner waited with bated breath as they discussed what they'd seen.

Finally the doctor and nurse, as well as the senior healer present, walked over with smiles.

"Good news Ambassador." Said the doctor. "I think... that once Nurse Choi and myself get better acquainted with magic, we should be able to do something about your condition."

"Really?" She asked, not sure if she believed it or not. "You can fix this?"

The doctor's face didn't change from happiness, but it did gain a slight... tempering.

"Well. I don't know about CURING it." She said, and Werner felt her heart drop. "BUT.... I do think we can undo the damage that has been caused so far. And in the future should be able to repeat that process as often as needed to prevent the disease from killing you."

For the first time in almost eight years, Werner felt genuine hope about her condition.

"So.... you can.... fix me?" She asked nervously. "Reset my brain back to the way it was? Back... before I had any symptoms?"

The doctor nodded, and the nurse see-sawed her hand a bit.

"Yes and no." Said the doctor. "It's not so much resetting it. We'd be working with a mage that... um..." She turned to the healer. "How did you explain it?"

The healer smiled. "A memory mage." She said. "They will help us maintain your mind's knowledge and memory while we reconstruct the damaged.... New-Rons?" She said hesitantly.

"Neurons, yes." The doctor confirmed. "Anyways. We should be able to reverse the damage. Then, whenever your symptoms return we should be able to simply.... do it again. We'll have to write down the whole process though, since that would likely take years. Or you know, ideally it would anyways."

Werner thought of the countless, vacuum packed and UV shielded packs of pills she had with her in her room, that she had to take every day just to combat the symptoms. The ones she had taken for years in increasingly strong doses.

The thought of not needing them, even if only temporarily, brought tears to her eyes.

"How.... How soon can we do this?" She asked.

The three people in front of her looked at each other for a moment.

"As soon as we get trained up enough." Nurse DeLaRosa said with a reassuring hand on Werner's shoulder.

She gulped. "Can you maybe take some night courses or something?" She asked with a laugh.

The doctor smiled. "To help a patient?" She asked. "Gladly."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zyjaw7/wait_is_this_just_gate_289/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (287/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zt1gzy/wait_is_this_just_gate_286/)

Writer's note: STORY..... PROGRESSION!!!!

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Enjoy.

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"So..... my soul's in the sword now?" James asked as he sat, staring at the weapon in question.

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hands passed over each of them. "It's an imprint of your soul, intertwined with the remnant of the original creator's imprint."

"Aaaaand... that's a bad thing?" James asked. "I mean, it's just an imprint. Not my ACTUAL soul right?"

"Well.... no..." She admitted. "But remember how I explained that weapons of this quality are products of MASTER capability both for forging the base weapon AND enchanting it?"

"Yeah." James recalled. "That's why I was surprised we got it to work again."

"But you've also admitted that it works differently now? Right?" She asked.

"Yeah. It's more aggressive now." He admitted. "And it doesn't just go after magical attacks now."

"That's because when you rebuilt it you were in an incredibly emotional state." She said. "Couple that with being helped by a skilled Dark Elf blacksmith, and quenching it with the milk of a spider queen. Then enchanting it with the help of a fortress town Dwelf enchanter." She shook her head a bit. "All that together and you effectively master crafted a new sword out of an already master crafted relic."

James considered it. He had known even at the time that the successful reconstruction had been almost impossible. But now that it was lain out like that, he had to admit that it was an impressive effort.

"Doubt you'd ever be able to recreate anything like this ever again." Veliry muttered, more to herself than to him.

"Is there a downside to this?" James wondered.

Veliry snapped out of her thoughts. "Um. No, not really." She said as she continued thinking. "But you'll be the only person who can use it effectively. At least until you die some day."

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"Yeah." She replied. "I was mostly just surprised at the quality of the enchantment on this. But really it's just a weapon that will only work at its best for you and only you."

"Oh..." He said hesitantly. "Well that's cool I guess. Now how about the fondue machine?"

"Uh.... sure... I have the pieces in the back room." She said awkwardly.

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"Good afternoon Sebastian." Atrafar said as she walked through the doors and into the castle.

"Atrafar." He greeted in return. Word of her party reaching the capital had travelled faster than the actual party had. "You're earlier than expected."

"Weather was good." She replied. "Are you certain about this?"

"Nope." He said simply. "But things keep getting crazier and crazier. Need the boost."

She cocked an eyebrow as a look of upset appeared on her face.

"That the wrong answer?" He asked.

"This isn't just.... gaining power." She said with reproach. "Sebastian, this is going to completely alter your life."

Vickers looked around at the room around them.

"Sooooo.... just like every piece of new information I learn in this world?" He asked. "Cause.... yeah. That's been everything here."

She tilted her head. "Vickers. You don't seem to be understanding me." She said sternly. "You're not going to be HUMAN... after this." She said, emphasizing the word human slowly. "You're about to become an entirely different kind of creature. Complete with a new body and entirely new senses and abilities." She looked away, as if remembering something painful. "New instincts."

"Yeah well, Military, War, SEALS, this place, Magic." He said. Then he looked away, remembering his own pains. "Treason?..... What's one more paradigm shift?" He asked. "I'll do what I always do; keep going."

Atrafar looked at him curiously. Then simply nodded.

"We've secured a building from the Royal Guard." She said simply. "It's being prepared as we speak. We should be able to perform the conversion in about two days." She handed him a scroll with the lunar council's seal. "Here's a list of the people we've brought with us and the types of were-folk they are. Prepare yourself and your affairs. Meet us there on dawn of the third day. That will be your last chance to back out." Then she simply turned to walk away.

"That's it?" He asked. Surprised at the sudden departure.

She turned back, eyebrow cocked again. "Were you expecting more?" She asked. "I'm here on official council business."

"I mean. The council made it clear that you took a leave of absence to come here." He replied.

She nodded affirmative. "True." She replied. "But that's only AFTER you've been turned. To aide in your safe transition to a new lifestyle.

Until then I'm still on duty." She gestured at the white and green trimmed armor she was wearing.

"Fair enough." He said, holding up the scroll. "Well than, see you in a few days."

She nodded, then turned and walked away.

Vickers pursed his lips as he watched her depart.

"Why does that kinda sting?" He asked himself quietly.

He didn't notice the wolf's ear twitch a bit as he turned around.

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Samantha sat in her normal room once again wearing the large hoodie and sweats. Doctor Munro sat in the small chair off in the corner.

Major Marcus Dennis stood next to the bed checking the readouts on her charts.

"Still look human." He said. "Feet are still a bit long. Pointed ears and elongated canines. But other than that, looking fairly normal. Vitals are a bit concerning, but not bad."

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"How do you feel?" He asked. It had only taken about thirty minutes of awkwardly silent chart reading and light examination for him to ask that question. Dr. Munro huffed at the poor bedside manner.

Samantha just shrugged. She didn't want to admit that the slow transformation BACK into a wolf had caused her a lot of stress as she'd begun to watch her humanity fade again.

"I'm okay I guess." She said instead.

She didn't see Dr. Munro bristle uncomfortably behind her.

"Good." The Major replied. "Well than, we'll get you transferred over to the AMH over in Fort Rodriguez Texas. We should be able to get you on a plane tonight."

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"Dr. Munro?" A young nurse asked. "Miss Jenkins? One of the hospital lawyers is here for you."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zxpccg/wait_is_this_just_gate_288/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (287/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zt1fty/wait_is_this_just_gate_286/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zxpajg/wait_is_this_just_gate_288/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (286/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zs4xia/wait_is_that_just_gate_285/)

Writer's note: I start my four day weekend tomorrow so I won't be back until tuesday. Until then enjoy a bunch of different cliffhangers. You know, as is tradition.

Enjoy.

\~

"Well. This is Cheapside." Artair said as he and Kor'Os pulled up on the small town. "Another week and we'll be in the capital."

Kor'Os pulled her horse up to the hitching post at the edge of the town. They'd gotten the little spotted mare only a few days before from an Army garrison. Artair hitched Xhalya to a sturdy tree some dozen yards or so away.

She reached into a pouch on her belt and grabbed a bit of bread as she signaled for Green Eyes. A few moments later the raven landed on her arm and cooed at her.

"Word?" She asked the bird.

Green Eyes looked back the way he'd come. "More TOwn gone." He said in his Raven voice.

She gasped at the simple message. "Another town is gone?" She asked.

The raven stared at her for a moment, then nodded its head up and down twice.

"Shit." She said to herself.

"Prince- er... Rider." She called out.

He looked over from where he was pulling his overnight bag out of one of Xhalya's saddlebags. He read the worry on her face easy enough.

"Another one?" He asked with a look of concern. "That's three now. Did he say where?"

She turned back to Green eyes. "Where at little brother?" She asked as she handed him a bit of jerky that he gobbled up greedily.

The raven hopped up and down in a circle, then nipped at her hair.

"RivER." He said. "Small Town. No shiNY."

"Some kind of river village." She yelled over to the prince. "Small enough that there were no soldiers."

He shook his head as he approached. "Meaning they didn't get evacuated." He said. He'd sent word back to the garrison she'd been part of when they'd reached the first town on their journey, ordering them to evacuate the nearest towns as best as they could to prevent further casualties. But the net still had holes.

"Maybe we should keep riding." She said as she began undoing the horse's tether.

"No." He said sternly. "We need to stay at least the night. Let the mounts rest. Plus we'll let the locals know what's happening and to be ready to evacuate as well."

"Was it getting closer?" She asked the raven. It hopped up and down and nodded. Then shook. Then nodded again.

"Helpful." She said sarcastically.

"Come on." The prince said. "Let's find ourselves some rooms and talk to the town Sheriff."

\------------------

"Hello Captain Choi." The door said as he approached. He didn't think he'd ever get over the discomfort that caused every time it happened.

"Morning.... door." He replied before yawning. "Veliry in?"

"Yes." The door replied. "Do come in."

James stepped forward through the now opened doorway and into the lab.

"Hey Vel." He said to the back of the small mage as she studied a book on her desk while mixing a flask of something blue.

"Morning James." She said half heartedly. "How are you?"

"Looking for a distraction." He said honestly. "You ever figure out the design I gave you way back?"

"For the Fun-Dew machine?" She asked as she set the flask down gently and slowly stepped away from the desk, watching it as if it might explode at any moment. Which, for all he knew, it might.

"Fondue." He corrected as he eyed the desk curiously. "Should I be worried about that?"

She shook her head. "Just don't speak too loudly or bump that table." She said. "And yes. Like I said before, it's an easy enough design. We'll just need to enchant some basic fire magic into it. Are you finally asking to.... wait. That's right. You said you'd already learned enchanting. I've been meaning to ask about that."

James nodded, and before she could continue the line of questioning he drew his sword and held it out to her, handle first.

Veliry snatched it quickly and her eyes began glowing two separate colors.

She gasped as she studied it, and held it out a bit further, as if she was almost scared of it.

"That a good gasp or a bad gasp?" James asked.

"James." She said hesitantly as she turned the blade over and inspected the other side. "What exactly happened while you were reforging and re-enchanting this blade?"

\------------------------------

King Farrick put down the papers as his daughter entered. He did what he could to hide the concern at what the report in the stack had informed him of.

"Father." She greeted.

"Amina." He replied as he gestured at the chair across from him. "How is he?"

"How do you think he is?" She asked rather gruffly. "He's exactly how I said he would be." Her knuckles whitened from gripping the arms of her chair. "He didn't return until well after night fall last night. Stable hands reported him sleeping in his drake's pen most of the day."

The King nodded. "For what it's worth. Tell him I'm sorry." He said. Then he held up the report. "We're going to have to speed up your marriage." He said with no humor. "Unless you want it postponed by another emergency." He slid the papers across his desk and she snatched them up angrily.

He waited as she read over them.

She lowered the papers and looked off into space as she thought about the contents.

"That can't be right." She said. "That's... the other side of the country." She looked back at the report. "Entire towns? How's that possible?" She asked. "Are there any reports of Blight Possessed?"

He spread the papers in front of him a bit and shook his head.

"No mention of them so far." He replied. "Not that we know enough about what they're capable of to know if that means anything. And with us not even knowing where this is originating from."

'What are we doing about it?" She asked.

"What little we can." He answered. "Sigbert has dispatched three hundred of the Earth arrows to the surrounding towns. It's all we can spare. Plus your brother Artair of all people put out orders for evacuation of neighboring towns."

"Really?" She asked. "That's a change for him."

"Indeed. And it couldn't be at a better time. He's on his way here with an eyewitness of some kind."

"Should we dispatch griffin riders?" She asked.

"Already done." He said.

"So what can I do?" She wondered.

"For now. Nothing." He admitted. "I asked you to come to ask about James."

"You could have asked him yourself." She replied with a bit of anger.

"No." He said. "I've got a feeling that I'm one of the last people he wants to see right now."

"Wonder why." She said testily.

He glared at her for just a moment. Then his face softened. "You know WHY Amina." He said, and his voice sounded weary.

He was about to say more when there was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" He asked.

The guard outside answered. "The arch mage sir!"

"Another time daughter." He said before looking back at the door. "Enter!"

The door opened, and arch mage Marcos entered, hobbling on his cane as he approached.

"What is it Marcos?" He asked.

"I believe." The old mage began before plopping in to the chair next to Amina's. "That I have successfully replicated the designs given to us by the Captain."

Amina cocked an eyebrow. "Designs?" She asked curiously.

"There is a small issue of power." Marcos continued as if not hearing the question. "THe Earth... er... scientists... used something called um... nuclear power. We... do not have access to such things."

"Father." Amina interrupted. "What is he talking about?"

King Farrick looked at her with no emotion.

"He's talking about taking the upper hand from Earth." He said grimly. Then he turned back to Marcos. "Do you have an alternative for the power issue?" He asked.

\------------------------

Driscoll looked around at the people around him.

How long had this presentation been going on that he'd zoned out? Had he actually fallen asleep? That couldn't be right.

"Anyways, that's how we're going to get the Earth prisoners out of the capital." The odd, green skinned man said as they gestured at the map. "Any questions?"

A young woman in mage robes spoke up. "Don't the Petravians have Earth weapons now?" She asked. "What's our answer to that?"

Driscoll was just about to replay his suits camera's to catch up on whatever the plan had been while he was zoned out.

"Chief Driscoll?" The speaker addressed him, drawing his attention unexpectedly. "That's your field. How do we counter the... rifles... right?"

He nodded without meaning to. "Right." He said. "And the key is gonna be armor. Your mages are all capable of creating shields right?" He asked.

A large portion of the group nodded or murmured affirmative.

"Good. Those worked in the desert." He said. "The rest of us will just have to wear good old fashioned armor." He said while gesturing at his suit.

"Speaking of." The speaker interrupted. "Our priority among the prisoners is the Major and the other members of Chief Driscoll's squad."

Driscoll flinched at that. His squad had been captured?

"That can't be right." He said to himself inside his helmet. "Weren't they?...."

But where was that question leading him. Something had happened to his squad. But what?

"If we can recover the Chief's squad they will be a massive force multiplier to our forces." The speaker continued. "Plus their suits will give us access to massive amounts of information on the castle and its forces."

No. He thought. *They would USE that intel. but his people didn't just SHARE intel.*

But then again, he just had only moments before.

He looked around.

Who were these people? And where was he?

"I'm sorry." He said, interrupting the speaker. "Actually no... I'm not." He admitted as everyone turned to look at him. "But who the fuck are you people?"

"We're the Agency." The speaker answered matter of factly. "We recovered you from the desert to help us strike back at the Petravians." They looked at him curiously. "Are you okay chief?"

"I'm fine." He said. "But you're bullshitting me."

"What?" One of the people around him asked.

"First off." He began, counting on his fingers. "I don't remember any of that shit. Second; Me and my people don't get captured unless we WANT to get captured. And we can break out any time we want." He held up a third finger. "Lastly... my squad....." He shook his head as a migraine formed. "My squad is...." Something made him not WANT to remember it. "My squad is..."

"Chief." The speaker interrupted. "We're working with your command remember. We gave you the recovery verification phrase once your people warned us about it."

"Yeah." He said as he looked up at them with a look of anger. "And what was that?" He asked.

The speaker looked over at one of the people off to their side, and older looking woman in a hooded robe.

"Sherman's march, two seven thirty five, whiskey, niner." The woman said.

Driscoll looked at the log in his suit's files. Sure enough that WAS one of the codes.

"And what mission does that correspond to?" He challenged.

"Something called the Suez blockade." She answered. Then she corrected herself. "Er, the Suez Blockade Failure." She said.

"Shit." He said to himself.

Does that mean that I'm wrong about the guys? He wondered. *But what was I wrong about?*

"Chief?" The speaker asked again. "You okay?"

He looked up at them, suddenly uncertain.

"No." He said. "I think something's wrong."

"Well. It's still a few days before the royal wedding." The speaker said. "Go see the healers. Maybe you were hurt worse than we realized. We still don't fully understand how your suit works with your physiology. Maybe we missed something."

"Yeah." He said hesitantly as he stood up. "Yeah maybe that's a good idea. Sorry for the interruption."

As he left the room, it faded out of existence.

Except for the old hooded woman, who smiled wryly before stepping into a wall and disappearing.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zwvbhr/wait_is_this_just_gate_287/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (286/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zs4vv6/wait_is_this_just_gate_285/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I start my four day weekend tomorrow so I won't be back until tuesday. Until then enjoy a bunch of different cliffhangers. You know, as is tradition.

Enjoy.

\~

"Well. This is Cheapside." Artair said as he and Kor'Os pulled up on the small town. "Another week and we'll be in the capital."

Kor'Os pulled her horse up to the hitching post at the edge of the town. They'd gotten the little spotted mare only a few days before from an Army garrison. Artair hitched Xhalya to a sturdy tree some dozen yards or so away.

She reached into a pouch on her belt and grabbed a bit of bread as she signaled for Green Eyes. A few moments later the raven landed on her arm and cooed at her.

"Word?" She asked the bird.

Green Eyes looked back the way he'd come. "More TOwn go^(ne)." He said in his Raven voice.

She gasped at the simple message. "Another town is gone?" She asked.

The raven stared at her for a moment, then nodded its head up and down twice.

"Shit." She said to herself.

"Prince- er... Rider." She called out.

He looked over from where he was pulling his overnight bag out of one of Xhalya's saddlebags. He read the worry on her face easy enough.

"Another one?" He asked with a look of concern. "That's three now. Did he say where?"

She turned back to Green eyes. "Where at little brother?" She asked as she handed him a bit of jerky that he gobbled up greedily.

The raven hopped up and down in a circle, then nipped at her hair.

"RivER." He said. "Sm^(all) Town. No shiNY."

"Some kind of river village." She yelled over to the prince. "Small enough that there were no soldiers."

He shook his head as he approached. "Meaning they didn't get evacuated." He said. He'd sent word back to the garrison she'd been part of when they'd reached the first town on their journey, ordering them to evacuate the nearest towns as best as they could to prevent further casualties. But the net still had holes.

"Maybe we should keep riding." She said as she began undoing the horse's tether.

"No." He said sternly. "We need to stay at least the night. Let the mounts rest. Plus we'll let the locals know what's happening and to be ready to evacuate as well."

"Was it getting closer?" She asked the raven. It hopped up and down and nodded. Then shook. Then nodded again.

"Helpful." She said sarcastically.

"Come on." The prince said. "Let's find ourselves some rooms and talk to the town Sheriff."

\----------

"Hello Captain Choi." The door said as he approached. He didn't think he'd ever get over the discomfort that caused every time it happened.

"Morning.... door." He replied before yawning. "Veliry in?"

"Yes." The door replied. "Do come in."

James stepped forward through the now opened doorway and into the lab.

"Hey Vel." He said to the back of the small mage as she studied a book on her desk while mixing a flask of something blue.

"Morning James." She said half heartedly. "How are you?"

"Looking for a distraction." He said honestly. "You ever figure out the design I gave you way back?"

"For the Fun-Dew machine?" She asked as she set the flask down gently and slowly stepped away from the desk, watching it as if it might explode at any moment. Which, for all he knew, it might.

"Fondue." He corrected as he eyed the desk curiously. "Should I be worried about that?"

She shook her head. "Just don't speak too loudly or bump that table." She said. "And yes. Like I said before, it's an easy enough design. We'll just need to enchant some basic fire magic into it. Are you finally asking to.... wait. That's right. You said you'd already learned enchanting. I've been meaning to ask about that."

James nodded, and before she could continue the line of questioning he drew his sword and held it out to her, handle first.

Veliry snatched it quickly and her eyes began glowing two separate colors.

She gasped as she studied it, and held it out a bit further, as if she was almost scared of it.

"That a good gasp or a bad gasp?" James asked.

"James." She said hesitantly as she turned the blade over and inspected the other side. "What exactly happened while you were reforging and re-enchanting this blade?"

\------------------------------

King Farrick put down the papers as his daughter entered. He did what he could to hide the concern at what the report in the stack had informed him of.

"Father." She greeted.

"Amina." He replied as he gestured at the chair across from him. "How is he?"

"How do you think he is?" She asked rather gruffly. "He's exactly how I said he would be." Her knuckles whitened from gripping the arms of her chair. "He didn't return until well after night fall last night. Stable hands reported him sleeping in his drake's pen most of the day."

The King nodded. "For what it's worth. Tell him I'm sorry." He said. Then he held up the report. "We're going to have to speed up your marriage." He said with no humor. "Unless you want it postponed by another emergency." He slid the papers across his desk and she snatched them up angrily.

He waited as she read over them.

She lowered the papers and looked off into space as she thought about the contents.

"That can't be right." She said. "That's... the other side of the country." She looked back at the report. "Entire towns? How's that possible?" She asked. "Are there any reports of Blight Possessed?"

He spread the papers in front of him a bit and shook his head.

"No mention of them so far." He replied. "Not that we know enough about what they're capable of to know if that means anything. And with us not even knowing where this is originating from."

'What are we doing about it?" She asked.

"What little we can." He answered. "Sigbert has dispatched three hundred of the Earth arrows to the surrounding towns. It's all we can spare. Plus your brother Artair of all people put out orders for evacuation of neighboring towns."

"Really?" She asked. "That's a change for him."

"Indeed. And it couldn't be at a better time. He's on his way here with an eyewitness of some kind."

"Should we dispatch griffin riders?" She asked.

"Already done." He said.

"So what can I do?" She wondered.

"For now. Nothing." He admitted. "I asked you to come to ask about James."

"You could have asked him yourself." She replied with a bit of anger.

"No." He said. "I've got a feeling that I'm one of the last people he wants to see right now."

"Wonder why." She said testily.

He glared at her for just a moment. Then his face softened. "You know WHY Amina." He said, and his voice sounded weary.

He was about to say more when there was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" He asked.

The guard outside answered. "The arch mage sir!"

"Another time daughter." He said before looking back at the door. "Enter!"

The door opened, and arch mage Marcos entered, hobbling on his cane as he approached.

"What is it Marcos?" He asked.

"I believe." The old mage began before plopping in to the chair next to Amina's. "That I have successfully replicated the designs given to us by the Captain."

Amina cocked an eyebrow. "Designs?" She asked curiously.

"There is a small issue of power." Marcos continued as if not hearing the question. "THe Earth... er... scientists... used something called um... nuclear power. We... do not have access to such things."

"Father." Amina interrupted. "What is he talking about?"

King Farrick looked at her with no emotion.

"He's talking about taking the upper hand from Earth." He said grimly. Then he turned back to Marcos. "Do you have an alternative for the power issue?" He asked.

\------------------------

Driscoll looked around at the people around him.

How long had this presentation been going on that he'd zoned out? Had he actually fallen asleep? That couldn't be right.

"Anyways, that's how we're going to get the Earth prisoners out of the capital." The odd, green skinned man said as they gestured at the map. "Any questions?"

A young woman in mage robes spoke up. "Don't the Petravians have Earth weapons now?" She asked. "What's our answer to that?"

Driscoll was just about to replay his suits camera's to catch up on whatever the plan had been while he was zoned out.

"Chief Driscoll?" The speaker addressed him, drawing his attention unexpectedly. "That's your field. How do we counter the... rifles... right?"

He nodded without meaning to. "Right." He said. "And the key is gonna be armor. Your mages are all capable of creating shields right?" He asked.

A large portion of the group nodded or murmured affirmative.

"Good. Those worked in the desert." He said. "The rest of us will just have to wear good old fashioned armor." He said while gesturing at his suit.

"Speaking of." The speaker interrupted. "Our priority among the prisoners is the Major and the other members of Chief Driscoll's squad."

Driscoll flinched at that. His squad had been captured?

"That can't be right." He said to himself inside his helmet. "Weren't they?...."

But where was that question leading him. Something had happened to his squad. But what?

"If we can recover the Chief's squad they will be a massive force multiplier to our forces." The speaker continued. "Plus their suits will give us access to massive amounts of information on the castle and its forces."

No. He thought. *They would USE that intel. but his people didn't just SHARE intel.*

But then again, he just had only moments before.

He looked around.

Who were these people? And where was he?

"I'm sorry." He said, interrupting the speaker. "Actually no... I'm not." He admitted as everyone turned to look at him. "But who the fuck are you people?"

"We're the Agency." The speaker answered matter of factly. "We recovered you from the desert to help us strike back at the Petravians." They looked at him curiously. "Are you okay chief?"

"I'm fine." He said. "But you're bullshitting me."

"What?" One of the people around him asked.

"First off." He began, counting on his fingers. "I don't remember any of that shit. Second; Me and my people don't get captured unless we WANT to get captured. And we can break out any time we want." He held up a third finger. "Lastly... my squad....." He shook his head as a migraine formed.

"My squad is...." Something made him not WANT to remember it. "My squad is..."

"Chief." The speaker interrupted. "We're working with your command remember. We gave you the recovery verification phrase once your people warned us about it."

"Yeah." He said as he looked up at them with a look of anger. "And what was that?" He asked.

The speaker looked over at one of the people off to their side, and older looking woman in a hooded robe.

"Sherman's march, two seven thirty five, whiskey, niner." The woman said.

Driscoll looked at the log in his suit's files. Sure enough that WAS one of the codes.

"And what mission does that correspond to?" He challenged.

"Something called the Suez blockade." She answered. Then she corrected herself. "Er, the Suez Blockade Failure." She said.

"Shit." He said to himself.

Does that mean that I'm wrong about the guys? He wondered. *But what was I wrong about?*

"Chief?" The speaker asked again. "You okay?"

He looked up at them, suddenly uncertain.

"No." He said. "I think something's wrong."

"Well. It's still a few days before the royal wedding." The speaker said. "Go see the healers. Maybe you were hurt worse than we realized. We still don't fully understand how your suit works with your physiology. Maybe we missed something."

"Yeah." He said hesitantly as he stood up. "Yeah maybe that's a good idea. Sorry for the interruption."

As he left the room, it faded out of existence.

Except for the old hooded woman, who smiled wryly before stepping into a wall and disappearing.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zwva0s/wait_is_this_just_gate_287/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (285/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zr2s1d/wait_is_this_just_gate_284/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James does an emotional recovery.

Enjoy

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It was night time when James finally woke back up.

He sat for a while longer, scratching Steve's head and neck in thanks as the massive drake rumbled and emitted the deep warmth unique to his kind.

But eventually James had to get up and get back to the world.

He walked through the silent dampness of the castle now that the rain had let up. The guards and servants parted for him with silent nods. His boots bounced against his legs as he carried them by their laces.

He passed the room he and Amina shared and instead continued on to the next hall over and to his mother and brother's room.

He knocked on the door and nobody answered. He figured his mother was probably still at the healing ward so he simply entered and sat on one of the chairs inside.

A few minutes later the door to the side room opened and Joey poked his head out.

"Mom?" He called. Then he looked around and spotted James. "James?" He asked instead.

"Hey Jojo." James said without looking.

"Are you okay?" Joey asked.

James thought for a few moments, Joey stepped out a bit further.

"Not really." James admitted with a shake of his head. Then he looked up and saw that his little brother's eyes were red. "You?"

Joey just shook his head a bit.

"Cause of the Veliry thing?" James asked.

"Yeah." Joey answered. "You did the thing? With the major?"

"Yeah." James replied solemnly.

"Did you do it?"

James took a deep breath. "Yeah."

The two of them stayed like that for a moment. Then James sat up a bit.

"Wanna talk about it?" He asked. "She said you were swearing off magic."

Joey shook his head "No" but began talking anyways.

"I don't think it would be safe." He said.

James nodded understanding. "Fair." He said simply. "But stopping your lessons isn't gonna prevent you from having the magic you've already got."

"I know." Joey said. "But it stops me from getting more. Keeps me low level. Keeps me out of bad situations."

James nodded again. "Fair." He repeated. "And she understands that. But I think she'd still like you to help her as an assistant. After all, you're the one that figured out the whole bag door thing. You should talk to her."

Joey thought about it for a few moments.

"Plus you aint gonna get your crush if you stay as far from her as possible." James said with a grin before Joey could respond. His little brother's face flushed red.

"I don't-" Joey began, stammering. His leg began to bounce a bit. "I don't have a-"

James just chuckled. "Remember little Susan Davies back when you were in third grade?" He asked, cutting off his stammering little brother. "You used to get so awkward and flustered around her. She was the one person that could shock you into talking unexpectedly without mentioning something nerdy."

"I... that was." Joey began. "I don't-"

"We all knew buddy. Mom and I." James continued. "Granted back then I wasn't exactly the charming, savvy guy I am now. But I could still tell you had a crush on her."

Joey looked like he might burst with embarrassment.

"Look." James continued. "I... don't know if you and Vel are ever gonna be a thing. She's.... quite a bit older than you. And honestly I think she's only into women, though we've never actually talked about it. But she clearly likes you. And very clearly cares about you. And even if it never becomes anything romantic you still shouldn't hold her at arms length." He said with a small smile. Then the smile faded. "This is a dangerous place. You never know how long you've got with the people you care about."

"I know that already." Joey said softly.

James looked at him wearily, then nodded understanding.

The two of them remained silent for a while again.

"You want to talk about your thing?" Joey asked after a while.

James took a deep breath. Then he smiled. "Nah." He said. "That ones for me to handle. But... talking to you helped Jojo."

Suddenly the door to the room opened and their mother came in, still wearing her healing robes.

"James?" She asked in surprise. "What are you doing here? Is everything okay?"

James nodded, still smiling.

"Yeah mom. I'm fine." He said as he stood up to greet her with a hug. "How was your training?"

His mom gestured at her eyes and they glowed red for just a second.

"I figured out the thing with my eyes that lets me see people's blood flow." She said excitedly. "This is going to make drawing blood and giving I.V.'s so, SO much easier."

James smiled even wider. "That's awesome. I think I've seen that one before..... um.... firsthand."

"Yes." She said with exasperation. "Several of the healers have told me as much."

Something dawned on James. He turned back to Joey.

"Hey Jojo. I think I know a bit of magic that might help you if you get overloaded again." He said. "Mom's eye thing reminded me of something."

\---------------------------

Atrafar Stalwart stopped as she and her other party members got to the edge of the capital.

It had been a long time since she'd been here, and last time the city had still been mourning from the destruction of the Elemental. At the time it had mostly smelled of burnt buildings and the dull sorrow that came from a city in mourning.

Now it smelled of the freshly cooked food, freshly poured booze, and of course like the rain.

"We are finally here." Jaegheri said as he stepped up next to her. "I have never been to the capital before."

"It's not as nice as the Elven wood villages." Atrafar said. "But it is much more lively."

"Excited to see your mate?" The jaguar-like man asked.

Atrafar sighed as she rolled her eyes.

"He's not my mate." She said for what seemed like the thousandth time since they'd left the Lunar Council City.

"Yes. A member of the Outer Light requested a leave of absence to oversee the turning of a man who ISN'T her mate." He said smugly.

Atrafar simply walked away.

"Come on." She said, ignoring him. "We need to secure and set up a room for an un-blooded turning."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zt1fty/wait_is_this_just_gate_286/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (284/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zq6cd0/wait_is_this_just_gate_283/)

Writer's note: What? Did you expect gore-porn or something? Nah dawg.

Enjoy.

\~

James gripped the handle of the massive axe, so similar in design to the one that Kela had once carried, and listened as the King spoke to the small gathering. He wiped a bit of rain from his eyes as he did, and was thankful for it.

"Major Denise Patinson of Earth. You have, on behalf of your superiors, led an expedition into the lands of an allied nation." The King said flatly. "And while this could have been considered a mission to rescue Earth citizens stranded by an experiment gone wrong. It must be called what it ACTUALLY was." He paused for effect. "It was an attempted invasion."

The Major said nothing, and showed no sign of acknowledging anything going on. She stood in her patchless uniform staring ahead with blank eyes.

"During this attempted invasion you killed a mining and exploration party of Clan Dunebasher's dwarves, a rider from Clan Drakrid, and a Royal army Patrol. And also abducted one of those soldiers to send to your world on a trip that you were uncertain would leave them alive." He continued. several gasps and cries of shock could be heard over the pattering of the rain. "Then you requested additional supplies and

armaments from your government to hold your position KNOWING that we would be forced to send reinforcements for the lost patrol."

Werner, standing a few yards from the King on the balcony, coughed. The King sighed as he glanced that direction for a moment.

"Your government has disavowed these actions as those of a rogue soldier acting of their own volition." He said. "Which tells me that either they're lying, or that you make a piss poor leader. I am.... politically inclined.... to believe the latter."

Still, the Major remained unmoving.

"Then when an Army of my soldiers, led by my very own daughter and General, attempted to secure your forces peacefully, you instead opted to open fire." He gripped the wooden railing with white knuckled anger that James himself felt for a lot of different reasons. "You used weapons my people don't even understand to slaughter them wholesale, when a peaceful arrest was an option." He hissed. "You killed Petravian citizens so effectively that we still aren't completely certain how many were lost because their bodies were incinerated."

The King took a moment to calm himself.

"And did you know that that initial scouting party's only intentions were to secure your people so that we might help them get home?" He asked. "They had no intention of harming any of you. Only to confirm who you were and where you were from and then bring you to the capital."

This finally drew the Major's gaze. She looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

But she still said nothing.

"For these crimes, and because you are NO LONGER a member of your world's military FORMER Major Patinson." The King said venomously. "You are sentenced to death."

James closed his eyes as he adjusted his grip again.

The two guards next to the former Major pushed her forward and forced her to her knees. They held her arms up at an angle behind her and one of them planted a foot on her back. The hold put her head in the perfect spot for the axe to take it off.

James walked toward the woman in a daze. He didn't want to be here.

Didn't want to be the one doing this. Shouldn't have been the one doing this.

James got next to the kneeling woman. She craned her neck to look up at him with empty eyes.

"Denise Patinson." The King addressed her one final time. "Any last words?"

She remained silent.

"So be it." The King said simply. "Captain." He said to James.

James stared down at her.

How could she remain so passive? Why wasn't she saying anything? She'd been so defiant back in the desert. How could she just sit her and accept this fate?

Sure she probably would have gotten the same treatment back on earth. Life in prison. Probably even a death sentence. Lord knew the Military had become harsher in its punishments during the Water War and hadn't loosened its rulings since. But James still couldn't understand this silent acceptance.

James dropped the axe down until its massive head was resting on the ground.

"Captain Choi?" The King asked curiously.

James struggled to justify any of it. She'd shot at him with the Miffy's. She'd tried to kill him again. Had tried to kill Amina, and Veliry, and in her own way even his little brother. But she herself hadn't pulled the trigger on any of them.

But her orders had. And those same orders had killed hundreds more before the battle had ended.

"Captain Choi!" Werner yelled before the king could. "Perform the duty you agreed to."

James looked up at the ambassador with fury in his eyes. He'd disliked her since day one of her being here. Now had the nerve to try and order him to execute someone.

"Fuck you Werner." He said under his breath. The former Major huffed at the silent curse.

"Captain Choi." The King repeated. "You put the peace of our worlds at risk right now."

James's hand flashed to his waist.

He didn't even look as he did it.

BANG!

Everyone present, including the two guards next to him flinched back in surprise at the noise and unexpected action. In doing so they released Patinson's wrists.

Her lifeless body fell limply into the red and pink splattered mud.

James and the King stared at each other for several long seconds.

Then King Farrick nodded subtly, and James walked away from the dead body silently, leaving the axe to fall into the mud next to her.

\---

Vickers watched from one of the nearby doorways, wearing a heavy cloak against the rain. The cloak had the added benefit of keeping his face from being seen.

He listened to the whole thing. Watched as Choi stood motionless, thinking about what he was going to do. Heard Werner chime in. Saw the words on Choi's lips, even though he didn't hear them.

Part of him regretted not sneaking into the castle's jail and offing the Major on his behalf, sparing him the blood that was now on his hands.

But there was too much risk to that. And too many kinds of that risk too.

Plus he needed to see how Choi handled this.

Even he flinched at the shot. He'd forgotten just how fast the young Captain was with a pistol.

The fact that Choi hadn't even looked at the kill was curious. Normally he thought it might have been a sign of cowardice. But he knew full well that if there was one thing Choi WASN'T, it was a coward.

No. This was an act of defiance. It may have been a small act, and a somewhat childish one, but it still was one.

The pistol was an act of defiance against the King.

And not looking, not engaging with the act, was defiance against the President and Werner.

As Choi stalked out of the courtyard Vickers grinned.

"Lil shit knew he was being punished." He said to himself as he turned and walked through the doorway and into the castle again.

\---

"I see that some of our suspicions were correct." Dr. Munro said as Samantha sat in the chair in front of her desk inspecting herself in the hand mirror. "Though I hope this doesn't cause undue stress if it doesn't end up being permanent."

Samantha placed two of her fingers over the end of her nose, covering the small dark pad there that still looked canine. With it covered her

nose looked almost like it had when she was human. It even had the few freckles that had always crossed its bridge.

"It'll be permanent." She said. "It has to be. It will be." Then she pulled her lips up and inspected the nice square teeth there. Her canines were still a bit long, but not exaggeratedly so. "Positive thinking." She said.

"Normally I'm all for positivity." The doctor said. "So long as it's tempered by due caution."

"Screw that." Samantha said. "I just want to get my body back."

Dr. Munro watched her inspect herself for several moments. The obsession was worrying.

"Samantha, do you know why I asked you to come in today?" She asked.

"To check up on my transition back to normal?" She mused as she moved her hair out of the way of her ear and ran her finger around it. It still had a bit of a point, and some fur on its top side. But other than that it looked normal.

"No." Dr. Munro replied. "The military wishes to have you transferred to their care." She said with a bit of a break in her voice. "Our legal people are working to prevent it because none of you can be said to be 'cured' or 'stable' just yet. But they are still sending in military doctors to evaluate you."

That finally got Samantha to drop the mirror and pay attention.

"They're coming to take me away?" She asked. "What for?"

Dr. Munro shrugged.

"Take your pick." She said. "Because you're potentially dangerous now that you.... effectively, have super powers. Because you regenerate. Because there are still two packs of werewolves who escaped the cordon and are unaccounted for. And in your case... well, you are still technically a soldier."

Samantha placed the mirror on her lap, face down, and looked down at the ground as she thought.

On the one hand, she WAS still a soldier, like the doctor said. She couldn't just IGNORE orders if they were given to her.

But on the other hand, she knew for a fact that the attack that had caused this had originated from the very facility she'd been tasked with guarding. Someone in that facility had been toying with whatever had created werewolves, and now she was one.

She didn't know if she wanted to put herself back in their control.

"Samantha?" The Doctor asked, breaking her out of her thoughts. "What are you thinking?"

She looked away for a second.

Then she turned back.

"How strict is that whole doctor-patient confidentiality thing?" She asked nervously. "Also, are any of the other... werewolves... working with lawyers?"

\----------

James walked into the pen in a haze.

He kicked his boots and socks off and walked on the mixture of straw and dirt with bare feet.

He tossed his uniform shirt at the bars of the pen, hoping to get it hung up on one of the cross bars, and watched as it instead fell to the dirt in a heap. He'd have to clean it later.

Steve watched him with that intelligent curiosity that he always had.

James dropped the pistol into a pile of hay that had what looked like a cow bone sticking out of it.

Finally, James walked up to Steve and gave the drake a hug. Steve recoiled a bit at how wet James was, then relaxed.

James slid down the drake's side and turned until he was sitting with his back against the massive lizard's furred side.

Steve seemed to sense the whirlwind of emotions within his master and did what little he could. First bringing his massive head curling in to rest on James's legs, then curling his tail up around that so that he formed a massive, protective, spiral around his rider.

James leaned forward, resting his head on his arms, which were resting on Steve's furred head.

He didn't want to be alone right now. But he also didn't want to talk to anyone. And Steve was the perfect companion for both of those needs.

The two of them stayed like that until James was lightly snoring on the drake's head.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zs4xia/wait_is_that_just_gate_285/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (283/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/znsyno/wait_is_this_just_gate_282/)

Writer's note: Tiny little like... two day... time skip story wise. Aaaaand James gets to be a villain for just a second. Every officer gets there at some point.

Also this is a good reminder that even without magic, James had been training almost daily (minus his extended hospital stays) with some of the best warriors in the land for almost two years now.

Enjoy(?)

\~

James stood rooted in the arena of the castle's training yard watching First Sergeant Nguyen as he picked through the items on the weapon table.

Don't take it. He thought. *Don't take the pistol. It will only make this worse.*

Then he saw Nguyen spot it, tense up in surprise, and then take the pistol in question and tuck it into the holster on his chest.

"Dammit." He said as he prepared himself for what was coming.

Nguyen spent a few more moments checking the table and settled on a one handed battle-hammer and a rectangular shield.

Then he stepped into the arena.

James closed his eyes and breathed deeply, intentionally hyperventilating for a few seconds, as the King began to speak.

King Farrick adressed the crowd. First letting them know that he was already aware of their gossiping about the battle in the desert, then assuring them that he didn't mind because he was accustomed to them doing so. He explained the broad strokes of what had led to the battle, and how Nguyen had ended up in the current situation. How he and James had discussed whether lashings were appropriate, and had ultimately presented Trial By Combat as an alternative.

The King admitted not liking the idea, especially since in theory Nguyen MIGHT escape unscathed.

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"Good enough?" He asked.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zr2u26/wait_is_this_just_gate_284/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (283/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/znsx83/wait_is_this_just_gate_282/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Tiny little like... two day... time skip story wise. Aaaaand James gets to be a villain for just a second. Every officer gets there at some point.

Also this is a good reminder that even without magic, James had been training almost daily (minus his extended hospital stays) with some of the best warriors in the land for almost two years now.

Enjoy(?)

\~

James stood rooted in the arena of the castle's training yard watching First Sergeant Nguyen as he picked through the items on the weapon table.

Don't take it. He thought. *Don't take the pistol. It will only make this worse.*

Then he saw Nguyen spot it, tense up in surprise, and then take the pistol in question and tuck it into the holster on his chest.

"Dammit." He said as he prepared himself for what was coming.

Nguyen spent a few more moments checking the table and settled on a one handed battle-hammer and a rectangular shield.

Then he stepped into the arena.

James closed his eyes and breathed deeply, intentionally hyperventilating for a few seconds, as the King began to speak.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zr2s1d/wait_is_this_just_gate_284/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (282/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zn0k5t/wait_is_this_just_gate_281/)

Writer's note: Episode..... (looks up)..... 282 of "James if you literally just took five seconds to unfuck your brain you might not be in this mess"

And also Joey being... god... just... the best. Even if it's painful.

Enjoy.

\~

IT was well past sundown when James finally finished reading the papers he'd set to going through. Amina had stopped by a few times to change the few bandages she still had to wear, and to change into formal, unarmored, clothes for official business. She'd seen how upset James was and the two had shared only a few words. She'd known what his meeting with the king had been about the day before so she'd already known WHY he was mad.

When he finally set the papers aside he rubbed his face with his hands and looked at the remaining two thirds of the paperwork that was still left.

He'd grown more and more frustrated and stressed with each page he finished.

He'd warned Amina and the King about just how good the Governments of his world were at legal papers. He should have listened to his own advice and looked closer at the papers before signing them.

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Eventually, after numerous odd looks and whispered questions, that he intentionally ignored, he arrived at the familiarly odd door.

He paused before he reached the slightly off colored stone in the wall that he'd noted as being the door's limit of perception. He had gone over what he was about to do countless times since he'd been brought out of his funk by James, and subsequently realized what he needed to do.

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"Hello. May I come in?" He asked as he moved closer, avoiding the gaze of the eye near the door's center. The door had learned early that he didn't do well with eye contact, and so always made sure to keep them minimal when he approached.

"Certainly." It replied after a moment before receding.

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Joey stepped into the laboratory hesitantly and waited. He heard a few strikes of what he assumed was a hammer on some metal. Then Veliry came out of one of the back rooms and approached him eagerly with a smile and her arms outstretched for a hug.

Joey held up a hand in warding and she stopped, a look of concern on her face.

"Is everything okay?" She asked. "I'm glad you're out and about again. Also nice beard. Looks just like James's."

"Thank you." He said as he fumbled the amulet out of his pocket and held it up. "And I came to say thank you for helping me out." He took a deep breath. "In the desert. Also, I'm sorry if I scared you."

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"Joey. What's going on?" She asked.

Joey gulped nervously. "I.... I think I should stop learning magic Miss Veliry." He said.

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"I.... I'm sorry." He continued. "This ISN'T your fault." He could feel tears forming on his eyes and he struggled to hold them in. "I should have known when I began, that... that my brain... and how it works... might make magic a dangerous thing to have. And I don't want to be..." He gulped again. "I don't want to be dangerous. I don't want to hurt anyone. Not even by accident. Not again."

"Joseph that wasn't your fault." She tried to say. But as she approached he stepped back.

"It is." He said. "Everyone keeps acting like it isn't because I can't help how I am. But it IS." He said sternly, his hands up to keep her

back. "I knew I wasn't typical and I jumped into a field where that could be a problem. And then it was. That makes it more my fault than anyone else's. I should have known better." He lowered his hands and smoothed his pants a bit with one to cover up the fact that his leg was twitching. "I'm sorry but I don't think that beginning my training again would be in anyone's best interest."

He moved to turn away, but Veliry placed a hand on his shoulder and turned him back.

"But I could teach you how to control it better." She said. "With training we can get past this."

Joey shook her off by dipping his shoulder.

"But I'd have to get STRONGER for that to happen." He said. "That's what you taught me. Advancement means greater power. What happens if I get stronger and I slip? Or if I get overwhelmed again? Get... get scared again?" He asked as a tear rolled down his cheek. "I KILLED someone Miss Veliry. And all they did was slip in the sand. And I hurt myself." He said as he looked down at the light scars on his hand. "And I hurt James. I've hurt James before but NEVER like that. It was nothing but luck that he'd already been hurt that way." She could hear the fear in his voice as he admitted the fact. "Rule one: Don't hurt people." He said softly to himself.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zq6cd0/wait_is_this_just_gate_283/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (282/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zn0ij9/wait_is_this_just_gate_281/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Episode..... (looks up)..... 282 of "James if you literally just took five seconds to unfuck your brain you might not be in this mess"

And also Joey being... god... just... the best. Even if it's painful.

Enjoy.

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It was well past sundown when James finally finished reading the papers he'd set to going through. Amina had stopped by a few times to change the few bandages she still had to wear, and to change into formal, unarmored, clothes for official business. She'd seen how upset James was and the two had shared only a few words. She'd known what his meeting with the king had been about the day before so she'd already known WHY he was mad.

When he finally set the papers aside he rubbed his face with his hands and looked at the remaining two thirds of the paperwork that was still left.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zq6b1y/wait_is_this_just_gate_283/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (281/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zl8i2b/wait_is_this_just_gate_280/)

Writer's note: Sorry if yesterday's absence surprised you. Work got a bit backed up yesterday and by the time it got not-backed-up I was just not down to write.

And look at that. James actually does the smart thing for a change. READ THE FINE PRINT JAMES. READ THE FINE PRINT!

Enjoy.

\~

"You do appear... less... lupine." Dr. Munro said hesitantly. "And I think you are a few inches shorter. Of course, I'm barely five two so... it can be hard for me to tell. How do you feel?"

Samantha Jenkins studied her fingers with just a glimmer of hope. The nails were shorter, rounder, and just a bit lighter in color.

When she'd looked in the mirror that morning, as both an exercise in coping AND to clean herself up, she'd noticed that her teeth were somewhat stubbier, and that her eyes were less of a yellow and more of a dark amber. Her ears had seemed lower to her. It had made her wonder if she was imagining things.

"Good." She replied. "Does..... does this mean I'm becoming human again?"

"I... I don't know." The doctor answered honestly. "Let me check some things." She said as she moved to her desk and began typing at her computer. She also picked up the phone there and hit one of the speed dial buttons.

Samantha held the small hand mirror that the doctor had given her, back when they'd first started working together, and pulled her lips back to check the teeth again.

"Hi Miranda." Doctor Munro said into the phone, still typing as she pressed it to her shoulder. "Yes. Corporal Jenkins has had a bit of a development. Can you please put me in touch with Dr. Wilder or Dr. Esteves. Whichever one is available, or their aides if they aren't..... Yeah, that's fine." She focused on the computer for a moment. "Well.

That may be part of the reason." She said as she saw something on the screen. "Samantha?" She called with one hand while the other held the phone in place. Samantha looked over and the doctor waved her over.

Samantha walked over hestitantly, putting the hand mirror into her hoodie pocket as she did. Was she ready to see the answer that the doctor had potentially found? She didn't have much of a choice.

She looked over the doctor's shoulder as she slid her chair sideways. "Yes. I'm still here." Dr. Munro said as the person on the other end said something. "Fantastic. Thank you Miranda."

Samantha looked at the screen. On it was two calendars. One of the calendars had notes written on it. The header read "CPL JENKINS PROGRESS". The other was pulled up on a web browser. Each day had an image of the moon, and tracked it's cycle through the month.

She looked down at the date in the corner of the screen. Then matched it to the one on the calendar.

They were only a week away from a new moon.

She felt her head and shoulders fall in defeat. The answer was just more werewolf stuff. She was simply changing with the moon like a cliche.

She was about to walk back around the desk when the doctor, who was still conversing with whoever she'd gotten a hold of, slapped her shoulder lightly. She looked over and the doctor pointed at one of the days on HER calendar.

She looked at it and saw a note that said. "Day of incident.". The one next to it read "CPL Jenkins brought in while still sedated."

She looked at it curiously. Her head tilted a bit subconsciously. Then she looked over at the lunar calendar.

Her head tilted even more.

"Wait ho-" She began.

She was cut off by Doctor Munro's hand waving for silence as she listened to the phone.

"Thank you Doctor Wilder that helps quite a bit." She said before listening to a bit more. "That's fantastic..... No. No I don't think we're at that point yet. Though she has expressed some interest in meeting them. Hopefully we can make that happen soon." She slid over and looked like she was about to hang up. "Sounds good. I'll ask her, she's right here..... You too. Alright bye." She said before placing the phone back in its cradle.

"If the moon is causing this change of mine as we get closer to the new moon, than how did I change INTO this DURING a new moon?" She asked as the doctor faced her.

"That was exactly what I was wondering." Doctor Munro answered. "And that was one of the other psychiatrists dealing with someone else in a similar position to yourself. He said that they are experiencing a similar change. I'm willing to bet that Doctor Esteves would say the same."

"And you want me to meet the people they're taking care of?" Samantha asked curiously. "Why?"

"Eventually." The Doctor answered. "Once you're a bit more adjusted to your situation. And them to theirs. In the mean time I'm still curious about this shift. I wonder how far it will go. Will the new moon see you looking full human again? And what happens when the new moon passes?"

"That's what I was about to ask." Samantha agreed. "More or less."

"Well." The doctor continued. "I suppose the only way to know for sure is to go through it, and pray to whatever 'GOD' it was that supposedly gave you this power that the new moon means you're back to normal. Maybe it'll mark the end of this. In the mean time, lets go to the exam room so we can take a few pictures for data's sake."

Samantha sighed. She really didn't like the exam room. Something about it made her uncomfortable, even though she'd never had problems with doctors visits before.

"Okay." She said glumly as she stood back up to follow the doctor.

"Hey Samantha?" Doctor Munro said.

"Yeah?"

"You spent several minutes looking at yourself in the mirror just now." The doctor answered. "That's got to be a new record."

She paused as she thought about it, pulling the mirror from her pocket as she did and looking at her eyes again. They seemed even darker than this morning, though that could've been just a matter of lighting.

"Huh. I guess I did." She admitted.

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James was lucky, and to an extent happy, to find his and Amina's room empty by the time he made it back. He didn't want to have to explain the situation a second time in one day. Plus, she'd already known the message that the King had had for him.

But also he just wanted to have a chance to vent without upsetting anyone.

He stomped over to the table that he'd set the papers on after he'd signed them and returned. He grabbed them off the table, then walked

over to the small bar that Amina had in their room and pulled out some of the liquor there.

James sat with the papers and the bottle and began reading.

He hated legal paperwork.

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Despite having a chronometer built into his suit that was accurate down to a one hundredth of a second, Driscoll didn't know how long he had been in the small room. The time display on his HUD seemed to speed and slow at random intervals that he hadn't been able to parse just yet. Part of him wondered if it was just his perception that had changed it. But no, the timestamps on his recording feeds didn't match up either.

It didn't help that the small room was completely devoid of detail. Not just in the sense of being boring either. It was made of a completely flat, almost glass like, grey stone, as if it were the most expertly polished concrete in existence.

He was about to slam his fist into one of the walls when a section of the opposite wall opened, allowing light into the otherwise bland room. A short woman stepped peeked in hesitantly. Her eyes widened as she saw him and she rushed in.

"We've finally found you!" She exclaimed as she got near.

Driscoll stepped back with his remaining hand in a defensive position.

She paused in her stride and held her hands up in a non threatening gesture.

"Woah! Woah Chief Driscoll." She said as she slowed. "I'm not an enemy. I'm here to get you out of here."

"Who are you?" He asked.

"My name is Andressa." She replied. "We've been trying to find you for weeks now."

"Who has?" He asked. "Where are we? Did you say two weeks?"

"I'm with the Petravian Military." She said. "After the battle the Guardian- that's the man that used the spiders to subdue you, took you into the deep dark and handed you over to the agency." She said as she approached. "Once they realized you were missing your government negotiated for a rescure operation. Apparently your suit is too valuable for them to just let you fall into agency hands."

That.... sounded correct to Driscoll. But there was something wrong with this woman. He didn't know how but he felt like he knew her somehow. He pulled up his recent video records. But there were just too many missing sections, and too much missing time.

"Have we.... met?" He asked. "Why do I feel like I know you?"

"I don't know." She said. "I'm just part of the recovery party. We're mostly mages. The Agency's facilities are almost always filled with poison. Your suit is protecting you. I'm using magic to breath. but we've also got someone called a.... too-lee?" She said uncertainly. "He's wearing a big puffy suit."

"You've got a toolie with you?" He asked as he looked down at his mangled arm.

"Yes. But we've got to g-" She began before he heard an explosion from somewhere out in the hallway beyond. "Shit. They still haven't gotten that golem out of the way." She jogged over and took his good hand. "Come on. We need to go."

Driscoll let her lead him for a moment. But something nagged at the back of his mind.

"Something's wrong." He said inside his helmet..

"Yeah I know." She said as she pulled him.

Driscoll froze in place. His hand locked onto hers with increasing pressure, causing her to jerk to a halt.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

"What recovery phrase were you told to say?" He asked as the pressure continued to grow.

"What?" She asked.

He pulled her back a bit. "Standard SOP is to provide non-squad recovery personnel with a phrase to say to a downed or captured operator to assure them that you're a friendly."

Driscoll applied more pressure. Her hand made a slight cracking noise.

"Ow! What the hells?" She exclaimed as she struggled to loose her hand. "Errr. Shit! What was the phrase they gave us?" She asked as he heard bones begin to creak.

"I didn't say anything out loud." He said calmly. "I didn't chin my speaker on. You shouldn't have been able to hear me."

"What?" She wondered.

Driscoll crushed her hand even further and she began cursing.

"I said 'something's wrong'." He informed her. "But I didn't tell my suit to let you hear that. So why did you respond to it."

"I'm using magic." She said hastily. "I can hear more than a normal person."

Driscoll pressed his hand shut, crushing her hand into pulp.

"Bullshit." He said.

She screamed and brought her other hand up. Lightning started to form near her finger tips.

Driscoll swung her by her crushed hand and slammed her into the ground hard enough to break her arm.

Then he kicked her in the ribs and sent her flying into the wall nearby. He watched with satisfaction as she slumped to the ground limp.

There was a loud roar of some alien origin outside the room, followed by another explosion.

Driscoll turned and began walking toward the newly revealed door.

He almost made it before his heard her speak again. He was surprised that his suit didn't ping any movement as he turned and saw her moving to stand up.

"Damn." She said, her voice less concerned now, and a touch deeper. "This one's on me. We need to find out if that phrase thing is real too." She said.

"What the fuck?" He asked as he turned around to approach her again.

Suddenly his view changed. He felt a moment of panic as he realized that he was no longer looking at the inside of his helmet anymore. Instead he was looking at a room with a couple of people staring at him with looks of annoyance.

"Who the hell are you?" He yelled. "What is this?" He asked as he struggled to free his arms and legs from the dark matter that was engulfing them.

"Same questions every time." One of the people said in a nasal voice. "Lets reset and see if we can confirm that phrase thing."

"Attempt what? One hundred thirty seven now?" Someone who looked like a taller, leaner version of the woman he'd just tried to kill.

"One thirty eight." The nasal man said. He touched something on a table that began glowing a dark pink color.

And, as he struggled against his bonds, Driscoll went back to the grey room.

And so did his memory.

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Batty wavered as he slowly stood to his feet.

"No no." He said as the healer next to him reached out to help steady him. "I got it miss Pansa." He said as he stretched back and forth a bit, flexing his abdominal muscles as he did. "I got it."

"For the last time mister Batista; it's just Pansa." The healer said. "How does it feel?"

"It'll be MISS Pansa until you stop calling me MISTER Batista and just start calling me Batty." He shot back. "Or for dinner." He said with a devilish grin that made the older woman blush a bit. "And it's still stiff. But..... tight. Tight's more accurate. But not bad."

"Good." Pansa said. "Now the real trick."

"Toes?" He asked. She nodded. "Great. Yeah. Let's give it a go."

Slowly, and with great exertion, Batty bent forward and reached down to touch his toes. The trick was that he wasn't allowed to just drop. It had to be a slow drop. After roughly ten seconds he was touching his toes.

"Got it." He said with a deep breath.

"You know that's not the real test." She said sternly.

"I know." He said. "But I can always hope that you forgot."

"Come on Mister Batista. Back up."

Batty took several quick, deep breaths.

Then, slowly, and shakily, he began to rise back up. There were a few moments when he felt himself flagging and almost dropped back down. But, after nearly half a minute and with more than a bit of sweat beading on his face, Batty stood back up.

He swayed just a bit and Pansa steadied him.

"You good dear?" She asked.

Batty breathed deeply as he wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Yeah." He said after a moment. "Yeah. Just... like I said; still tight."

"But you're up." She said with a smile. "You're finally healed. Now it's just a matter of strengthening."

"And I can do that myself." He said. "Weekly checks now, right?"

"That's right. You're all done here." She said with a smile. "And no more wheel chair."

Batty nodded as he reached over to the pitcher of water nearby.

"Yaaaay." He said sarcastically as he grabbed the pitcher and drank directly from it.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/znsyno/wait_is_this_just_gate_282/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (281/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zl8g6f/wait_is_this_just_gate_280/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Sorry if yesterday's absence surprised you. Work got a bit backed up yesterday and by the time it got not-backed-up I was just not down to write.

And look at that. James actually does the smart thing for a change. READ THE FINE PRINT JAMES. READ THE FINE PRINT!

Enjoy.

\~

"You do appear... less... lupine." Dr. Munro said hesitantly. "And I think you are a few inches shorter. Of course, I'm barely five two so... it can be hard for me to tell. How do you feel?"

Samantha Jenkins studied her fingers with just a glimmer of hope. The nails were shorter, rounder, and just a bit lighter in color.

When she'd looked in the mirror that morning, as both an exercise in coping AND to clean herself up, she'd noticed that her teeth were somewhat stubbier, and that her eyes were less of a yellow and more of a dark amber. Her ears had seemed lower to her. It had made her wonder if she was imagining things.

"Good." She replied. "Does..... does this mean I'm becoming human again?"

"I... I don't know." The doctor answered honestly. "Let me check some things." She said as she moved to her desk and began typing at her computer. She also picked up the phone there and hit one of the speed dial buttons.

Samantha held the small hand mirror that the doctor had given her, back when they'd first started working together, and pulled her lips back to check the teeth again.

"Hi Miranda." Doctor Munro said into the phone, still typing as she pressed it to her shoulder. "Yes. Corporal Jenkins has had a bit of a development. Can you please put me in touch with Dr. Wilder or Dr. Esteves. Whichever one is available, or their aides if they aren't..... Yeah, that's fine." She focused on the computer for a moment. "Well. That may be part of the reason." She said as she saw something on the screen. "Samantha?" She called with one hand while the other held the phone in place. Samantha looked over and the doctor waved her over.

Samantha walked over hestitantly, putting the hand mirror into her hoodie pocket as she did. Was she ready to see the answer that the doctor had potentially found? She didn't have much of a choice.

She looked over the doctor's shoulder as she slid her chair sideways. "Yes. I'm still here." Dr. Munro said as the person on the other end said something. "Fantastic. Thank you Miranda."

Samantha looked at the screen. On it was two calendars. One of the calendars had notes written on it. The header read "CPL JENKINS PROGRESS". The other was pulled up on a web browser. Each day had an image of the moon, and tracked it's cycle through the month.

She looked down at the date in the corner of the screen. Then matched it to the one on the calendar.

They were only a week away from a new moon.

She felt her head and shoulders fall in defeat. The answer was just more werewolf stuff. She was simply changing with the moon like a cliche.

She was about to walk back around the desk when the doctor, who was still conversing with whoever she'd gotten a hold of, slapped her shoulder lightly. She looked over and the doctor pointed at one of the days on HER calendar.

She looked at it and saw a note that said. "Day of incident.". The one next to it read "CPL Jenkins brought in while still sedated."

She looked at it curiously. Her head tilted a bit subconsciously. Then she looked over at the lunar calendar.

Her head tilted even more.

"Wait ho-" She began.

She was cut off by Doctor Munro's hand waving for silence as she listened to the phone.

"Thank you Doctor Wilder that helps quite a bit." She said before listening to a bit more. "That's fantastic..... No. No I don't think we're at that point yet. Though she has expressed some interest in meeting them. Hopefully we can make that happen soon." She slid over and looked like she was about to hang up. "Sounds good. I'll ask her, she's

right here..... You too. Alright bye." She said before placing the phone back in its cradle.

"If the moon is causing this change of mine as we get closer to the new moon, than how did I change INTO this DURING a new moon?" She asked as the doctor faced her.

"That was exactly what I was wondering." Doctor Munro answered. "And that was one of the other psychiatrists dealing with someone else in a similar position to yourself. He said that they are experiencing a similar change. I'm willing to bet that Doctor Esteves would say the same."

"And you want me to meet the people they're taking care of?" Samantha asked curiously. "Why?"

"Eventually." The Doctor answered. "Once you're a bit more adjusted to your situation. And them to theirs. In the mean time I'm still curious about this shift. I wonder how far it will go. Will the new moon see you looking full human again? And what happens when the new moon passes?"

"That's what I was about to ask." Samantha agreed. "More or less."

"Well." The doctor continued. "I suppose the only way to know for sure is to go through it, and pray to whatever 'GOD' it was that supposedly gave you this power that the new moon means you're back to normal. Maybe it'll mark the end of this. In the mean time, lets go to the exam room so we can take a few pictures for data's sake."

Samantha sighed. She really didn't like the exam room. Something about it made her uncomfortable, even though she'd never had problems with doctors visits before.

"Okay." She said glumly as she stood back up to follow the doctor.

"Hey Samantha?" Doctor Munro said.

"Yeah?"

"You spent several minutes looking at yourself in the mirror just now." The doctor answered. "That's got to be a new record."

She paused as she thought about it, pulling the mirror from her pocket as she did and looking at her eyes again. They seemed even darker than this morning, though that could've been just a matter of lighting.

"Huh. I guess I did." She admitted.

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James was lucky, and to an extent happy, to find his and Amina's room empty by the time he made it back. He didn't want to have to explain the situation a second time in one day. Plus, she'd already known the message that the King had had for him.

But also he just wanted to have a chance to vent without upsetting anyone.

He stomped over to the table that he'd set the papers on after he'd signed them and returned. He grabbed them off the table, then walked over to the small bar that Amina had in their room and pulled out some of the liquor there.

James sat with the papers and the bottle and began reading.

He hated legal paperwork.

\--------------------

Despite having a chronometer built into his suit that was accurate down to a one hundredth of a second, Driscoll didn't know how long he had been in the small room. The time display on his HUD seemed to speed and slow at random intervals that he hadn't been able to parse just yet. Part of him wondered if it was just his perception that had changed it. But no, the timestamps on his recording feeds didn't match up either.

It didn't help that the small room was completely devoid of detail. Not just in the sense of being boring either. It was made of a completely flat, almost glass like, grey stone, as if it were the most expertly polished concrete in existence.

He was about to slam his fist into one of the walls when a section of the opposite wall opened, allowing light into the otherwise bland room. A short woman stepped peeked in hesitantly. Her eyes widened as she saw him and she rushed in.

"We've finally found you!" She exclaimed as she got near.

Driscoll stepped back with his remaining hand in a defensive position.

She paused in her stride and held her hands up in a non threatening gesture.

"Woah! Woah Chief Driscoll." She said as she slowed. "I'm not an enemy. I'm here to get you out of here."

"Who are you?" He asked.

"My name is Andressa." She replied. "We've been trying to find you for weeks now."

"Who has?" He asked. "Where are we? Did you say two weeks?"

"I'm with the Petravian Military." She said. "After the battle the Guardian- that's the man that used the spiders to subdue you, took you into the deep dark and handed you over to the agency." She said as she approached. "Once they realized you were missing your government negotiated for a rescure operation. Apparently your suit is too valuable for them to just let you fall into agency hands."

That.... sounded correct to Driscoll. But there was something wrong with this woman. He didn't know how but he felt like he knew her somehow. He pulled up his recent video records. But there were just too many missing sections, and too much missing time.

"Have we.... met?" He asked. "Why do I feel like I know you?"

"I don't know." She said. "I'm just part of the recovery party. We're mostly mages. The Agency's facilities are almost always filled with poison. Your suit is protecting you. I'm using magic to breath. but we've also got someone called a.... too-lee?" She said uncertainly. "He's wearing a big puffy suit."

"You've got a toolie with you?" He asked as he looked down at his mangled arm.

"Yes. But we've got to g-" She began before he heard an explosion from somewhere out in the hallway beyond. "Shit. They still haven't gotten that golem out of the way." She jogged over and took his good hand. "Come on. We need to go."

Driscoll let her lead him for a moment. But something nagged at the back of his mind.

"Something's wrong." He said inside his helmet..

"Yeah I know." She said as she pulled him.

Driscoll froze in place. His hand locked onto hers with increasing pressure, causing her to jerk to a halt.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

"What recovery phrase were you told to say?" He asked as the pressure continued to grow.

"What?" She asked.

He pulled her back a bit. "Standard SOP is to provide non-squad recovery personnel with a phrase to say to a downed or captured operator to assure them that you're a friendly."

Driscoll applied more pressure. Her hand made a slight cracking noise.

"Ow! What the hells?" She exclaimed as she struggled to loose her hand. "Errr. Shit! What was the phrase they gave us?" She asked as he heard bones begin to creak.

"I didn't say anything out loud." He said calmly. "I didn't chin my speaker on. You shouldn't have been able to hear me."

"What?" She wondered.

Driscoll crushed her hand even further and she began cursing.

"I said 'something's wrong'." He informed her. "But I didn't tell my suit to let you hear that. So why did you respond to it."

"I'm using magic." She said hastily. "I can hear more than a normal person."

Driscoll pressed his hand shut, crushing her hand into pulp.

"Bullshit." He said.

She screamed and brought her other hand up. Lightning started to form near her finger tips.

Driscoll swung her by her crushed hand and slammed her into the ground hard enough to break her arm.

Then he kicked her in the ribs and sent her flying into the wall nearby. He watched with satisfaction as she slumped to the ground limp.

There was a loud roar of some alien origin outside the room, followed by another explosion.

Driscoll turned and began walking toward the newly revealed door.

He'd almost made it before he heard her speak again. He was surprised that his suit didn't ping any movement as he turned and saw her moving to stand up.

"Damn." She said, her voice less concerned now, and a touch deeper. "This one's on me. We need to find out if that phrase thing is real too." She said.

"What the fuck?" He asked as he turned around to approach her again.

Suddenly his view changed. He felt a moment of panic as he realized that he was no longer looking at the inside of his helmet anymore. Instead he was looking at a room with a couple of people staring at him with looks of annoyance.

"Who the hell are you?" He yelled. "What is this?" He asked as he struggled to free his arms and legs from the dark matter that was engulfing them.

"Same questions every time." One of the people said in a nasal voice. "Lets reset and see if we can confirm that phrase thing."

"Attempt what? One hundred thirty seven now?" Someone who looked like a taller, leaner version of the woman he'd just tried to kill.

"One thirty eight." The nasal man said. He touched something on a table that began glowing a dark pink color.

And, as he struggled against his bonds, Driscoll went back to the grey room.

And so did his memory.

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Batty wavered as he slowly stood to his feet.

"No no." He said as the healer next to him reached out to help steady him. "I got it miss Pansa." He said as he stretched back and forth a bit, flexing his abdominal muscles as he did. "I got it."

"For the last time mister Batista; it's just Pansa." The healer said. "How does it feel?"

"It'll be MISS Pansa until you stop calling me MISTER Batista and just start calling me Batty." He shot back. "Or for dinner." He said with a devilish grin that made the older woman blush a bit. "And it's still stiff. But..... tight. Tight's more accurate. But not bad."

"Good." Pansa said. "Now the real trick."

"Toes?" He asked. She nodded. "Great. Yeah. Let's give it a go."

Slowly, and with great exertion, Batty bent forward and reached down to touch his toes. The trick was that he wasn't allowed to just drop. It had to be a slow drop. After roughly ten seconds he was touching his toes.

"Got it." He said with a deep breath.

"You know that's not the real test." She said sternly.

"I know." He said. "But I can always hope that you forgot."

"Come on Mister Batista. Back up."

Batty took several quick, deep breaths.

Then, slowly, and shakily, he began to rise back up. There were a few moments when he felt himself flagging and almost dropped back down. But, after nearly half a minute and with more than a bit of sweat beading on his face, Batty stood back up.

He swayed just a bit and Pansa steadied him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (280/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zkewgg/wait_is_this_just_gate_279/)

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Also, bottomless bags make having backup gear way easier for the adventurous backpacker.

Enjoy.

\~

If James had expected sympathy from Vickers, he didn't get it. Or not much of it anyways.

"That sucks kid." The SEAL replied after hearing James retell what the King had told him. "But it sounds like your hands are tied."

"Like hell they are." James said as he unzipped his uniform jacket and set it on the chair next to him. He'd used it to wipe his face clean since it was already soiled. "I'm not executing someone." He said. "And I'm definitely not flogging someone who did what they could to stop the whole thing."

"So what? You're gonna scream at the damn President? Resign from the army? Maybe make a show of tearing up all the papers you signed yesterday?" Vickers asked. "Ooh, I know; you can destroy the comm hub. I might actually help you with that one. It'll be cathartic or whatever."

James.... hadn't really thought that far ahead, if he was honest. He hadn't really had a plan for what he was going to do. He just knew that he had to do something, to give someone a piece of his mind.

"I don't know." He muttered.

"I didn't think so." Vickers replied. "That fight wasn't your fault Choi. The fact that the King has passed the verdict he has ISN'T your

fault. You're just unlucky enough to be the poor little grunt stuck between two governments that are doing everything in their power to see who has the bigger dick. And you're getting fucked as a result."

"Graphic." James said sullenly. "Fuck am I supposed to do?"

Vickers sighed as he sat down.

"I don't see a lot of options dude." He said after a moment. "On the one hand I'm surprised the Pres accepted flogging as a punishment. But on the other hand; healing magic makes it a fairly light punishment if the King allows it.

"It's still not right." James countered. "And it's gonna be excruciating. And I still don't think he deserves it."

"That's just because you know the guy." Vickers replied. "And at the end of the day the King's right. He COULD have stopped the fight before it began and he didn't. Granted, you're also right. It's not that simple for people in uniform. Hard to break years and years of conditioning to follow orders. But that doesn't make him innocent. He had a choice. May not have been an easy choice. And it obviously didn't work out for him. But he did have that choice. And guess what Choi. This gets to be another lesson for you about the burdens of leadership CAPTAIN."

"So what? I should just do it?" James asked.

"Never said that." Vickers said with a shrug.

"Then what do I do?"

"That's up to you." Vickers replied. "You said that part of your new duties was to come up with solutions for punishments that aren't kosher right?"

"Yeah." James answered.

"Supposed to offer alternatives right?"

"Yeah." James repeated.

Vickers shrugged again. "Well than. Find an alternative."

"Like what?"

"I don't know man. What about that trial by combat shit you did with Prince Asshole or whatever?" Vickers replied with a wave of his hand. "Hell, with the differences in your abilities you could kick the crap out of him, which'll please the King, while still giving him a shot at sticking up for himself. That oughta at least give you a bit of relief or whatever."

"Yeah, if the King goes for it." James countered.

Vickers shrugged one more time. "So put some teeth on the ground. Really thrash him. Give a pound of flesh and it oughta work. Even the King will know how much of a power disparity there is between you two."

"I don't know man." James said as he rubbed the bruise forming on his stomach. "Still doesn't feel right. And what about the major."

"Fuckin' kill her." Vickers said as simply as if he was stating the weather. "That bitch is fuckin' crazy."

"What?" James asked incredulously. "That's your solution to me not wanting to outright EXECUTE someone?"

Vickers nodded. "Yep." He said. "Saw her get interviewed by the King's people. She is grade-A nutso. Got a feeling you'd save everyone on both sides a lot of trouble if you just walked over to her cell and gave her a triple tap."

"Dude." James said in disgust.

Vickers held his hands up in a "what are you gonna do?" gesture.

"Hey, you were the one that actually spoke to her out on the sands." Vickers said as he leaned back. "You saw how blood thirsty she was. Even said so yourself. During the interview she was all rank, name, D.O.D. number and that's it. She's a fuckin zealot man. Hooah dialed all the way to eleven and then snapped off trying to go even further."

"That doesn't mean she deserves execution." James said uncomfortably.

"No. THAT doesn't." Vickers agreed. "But openly committing an act of war against an allied nation and giving orders that are war crimes in all but technicality do. She'd get the needle back on Earth, that's for sure." He nodded a bit. "Least beheading is a bit quicker."

"I still shouldn't be the one holding the axe." James said in exasperation. He hated that Vickers was right.

"No." Vickers admitted. "But it looks like the legalese says you gotta. And if it keeps our guys from sending over a nuke, or the King from sending a bunch of Elementals to home, then.... well... it's a small sacrifice from one guy for a bit less bloodshed." His eyes darkened as he recalled something he'd never tell James, or anyone else for that matter. "I've done worse for less." He admitted.

The two of them sat in tense silence for several minutes while James held his head in his hands and thought.

"Fuck." He said after a while.

"Yeah." Vickers agreed.

"I gotta go read that paperwork." James said.

"That'll be a nice change for you." Vickers replied.

"Fuck off." James shot back venomously as he grabbed his uniform jacket and stood up. "First I gotta go hit the healers. I think that punch knocked something loose again. At least it feels that way."

"It was a clean shot though." Vickers said as he also stood up, flexing his hand and forming some frost on it as he did. "Gotta admit that much."

"I'll get you back for that by the way." James said in response as he gingerly opened the door.

"Sure you will." Vickers said with a devilish grin.

Behind them the communication hub sat silently.

A small red light pulsed on the back of it. It had been pulsing ever since the table it was on had felt an impact from the two men fighting.

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"Was that a Trullbyr?" Artair asked as he wiped some of its gore off of his left hand scimitar with some of the creatures fur.

"Yes." Kor'Os replied as she cleaned her own great-sword with a rag and then tossed it into the new bonfire. "They're common enough this close to the Druidic lands."

"I though they were supposed to be tougher than that?" He said in a disappointing tone. "But that was remarkably easy."

Kor'Os nodded. "Having a drake that can breath fire made it a lot easier. Usually it's a matter of outlasting the thing until you can get a flame into an open wound."

"That's another thing." Artair said. "I thought they were fireproof?"

Kor'Os used her short sword to lop off one of the beasts six legs and lifted the limb up so he could see. Artair cringed at the admittedly disgusting display.

"Their outer hide is incredibly fire RESISTANT." She said in the same tone she used when training new scout recruits. "And if I had some vinegar and salt I'd save as much of the hide as I could. It makes for great cloaks. both fireproof and incredibly insulated. But I don't, so fire it is." She pointed at the layer of fat underneath its thick skin. "Their fat is what made that work. About as flammable as any oil out there. Hence the new bonfire. That'll burn all night." She said before tossing the limb on top of its former body.

"Still. That wasn't exactly a dangerous fight." Artair said. "I thought trullbyr were incredibly deadly."

"To someone unskilled or unarmed they certainly are." She replied with a smile. "You saw the claws, the rows of teeth in its mouth. If it had caught us unaware it would have been a bad time for at least one of us. Probably you."

"Whatever." Artair said simply. "Any chance there are more?"

"Unlikely." She replied. "They are incredibly territorial, and only share their territory for mating purposes. Once they do the deed they're back to fighting over their space." She tilted her head. "Sometimes they don't even wait to finish."

"Well now that's just rude." The prince said as he turned back and went back to making his tent. "Oh uh... Commander." He said a moment later.

"Hmm?" She said as she watched the creature burn inside its own skin, happy that they wouldn't need to worry about it regenerating and being a threat again later.

"It kind of ruined your tent." He said, pointing to the canvas of her tents roof, and a broken support as well.

"Dammit." She said as she made her way over. "That was my good one." She said as she pulled up the broken one, which was splintered half way. Then she pulled on the canvas and it made a squelching sound as it came out of the mud that one of the creatures feet had stamped it into deeply.

"My tent will have more than enough space if you'd like to share." He offered with obvious discomfort.

"Not necessary." She said simply. "I have spares."

"Oh. Good." He said with a polite smile. She didn't know it but he was glad that she wouldn't see him in his sleeping gear. "I'll get back to making my tent than."

"Same." She said as she pulled a spare support pole and a folded square of canvas to replace the dirtied one until she could clean it.

Thirty minutes later she was sitting comfortably next to the fire of the beast's burning body, using the flames to warm some tea while a fish from the nearby pond that the prince had mentioned. He was still struggling to set up his tent.

"Do you need help?" She asked as she sipped at the tea to see how it was doing.

"No?" He said with annoyance. "I do this all the time." He added, while not admitting that he typically stayed at inns or taverns instead.

"I can tell." She replied as she set the tea back down to warm some more. She didn't look forward to trullbyr smoked fish. But it was better than jerky or bottomless bag preserved bread for the millionth time. The

drake leaned against a tree nearby snacking on some creature it had caught at some point while she'd been bow fishing.

She sipped her tea as she looked over the expanse of land at the massive, slightly glowing, tree that marked the druid's land in the distance.

She wondered if they knew anything about what had happened back in the village. Or if maybe they might be attacked by it at some point.

"Hey. Ummmm. Your.... highness?" She called awkwardly.

There was a clatter of noise as something inside the tent was dropped, and she heard him swear in what she thought was old Frisian before his head popped out of the tent's door flap.

"What?" He asked. "And don't call me that. Call me Artair if you want. Or if that makes you uncomfortable than call me rider. It's common enough."

"Think the druids would know anything about the blight thing?" She asked. "And should we warn them about it."

He considered the notion for a moment, then simply shook his head.

"No." He said as he withdrew back into the tent. She heard him heave something up for a moment. Then he stepped back out with a large pot in his hands. "They likely already know something went wrong there. What with being in communion with nature. And an entire elvish forest home being destroyed? They've likely already sent some of their people to investigate. And my father has already met with them. They know only about as much about the blight as anyone else does." He shrugged a bit. "Big debate amongst them as to whether or not the blight patches can be considered NATURAL or not too."

Before she could say anything he'd set the pot next to the fire and grabbed her fish by the stick she'd skewered it on.

"Hey!" She cried out as he pulled a piece off and tasted it.

Artair immediately made a face and she couldn't help but smile a bit at his disgust.

"Ugh. Tastes like old shoe leather that's been burnt." He said with a shake of his head. He quickly handed her the stick which she snatched out of his hand. "You eat that?" He asked.

"Beats jerky and stale bread." She replied angrily as she inspected the piece of the fish where he'd taken his piece from. "Besides, it's not cooked all the way."

He shuddered. "Toss that to Xha and go catch a few more." He said. "I'll start a second fire while you do. I assume that flavors from the beast. Yeah?"

She nodded. "Don't need a second fire." She said. "Ones enough."

"Not if that fire poisons our food." He replied, hastily taking the pot back from the side of the blaze. "I'll make another."

"What is that anyways?" She asked while pointing at the pot.

He looked at the pot and smiled. "It's this new dish from up north. It's called white shell chowder." Then he pointed at the fish in her hand, his smile fading. "Now seriously, give that to Xha, catch a few more. We'll cook em on a PROPER fire and add them to the pot. I've done it before. It'll be great."

She looked at the burning Trullbyr. She supposed a second fire wouldn't hurt anything. After all it wasn't like the WEREN'T going to have this one going the whole night, and probably the morning.

Reluctantly, she tossed the fish over near the drake. She cut a branch off of a tree, submerged it in the fire, and stalked off toward the pond.

Xhalya sniffed at the fish and recoiled in disgust.

"I know girl." Artair said. "Disgusting. Right?"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zn0k5t/wait_is_this_just_gate_281/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (280/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zketlc/wait_is_this_just_gate_279/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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"Graphic." James said sullenly. "Fuck am I supposed to do?"

Vickers sighed as he sat down.

"I don't see a lot of options dude." He said after a moment. "On the one hand I'm surprised the Pres accepted flogging as a punishment. But on the other hand; healing magic makes it a fairly light punishment if the King allows it.

"It's still not right." James countered. "And it's gonna be excruciating. And I still don't think he deserves it."

"That's just because you know the guy." Vickers replied. "And at the end of the day the King's right. He COULD have stopped the fight before it began and he didn't. Granted, you're also right. It's not that simple for people in uniform. Hard to break years and years of conditioning to follow orders. But that doesn't make him innocent. He had a choice. May not have been an easy choice. And it obviously didn't work out for him. But he did have that choice. And guess what Choi. This gets to be another lesson for you about the burdens of leadership CAPTAIN."

"So what? I should just do it?" James asked.

"Never said that." Vickers said with a shrug.

"Then what do I do?"

"That's up to you." Vickers replied. "You said that part of your new duties was to come up with solutions for punishments that aren't kosher right?"

"Yeah." James answered.

"Supposed to offer alternatives right?"

"Yeah." James repeated.

Vickers shrugged again. "Well than. Find an alternative."

"Like what?"

"I don't know man. What about that trial by combat shit you did with Prince Asshole or whatever?" Vickers replied with a wave of his hand. "Hell, with the differences in your abilities you could kick the crap out of him, which'll please the King, while still giving him a shot at sticking up for himself. That oughta at least give you a bit of relief or whatever."

"Yeah, if the King goes for it." James countered.

Vickers shrugged one more time. "So put some teeth on the ground. Really thrash him. Give a pound of flesh and it oughta work. Even the King will know how much of a power disparity there is between you two."

"I don't know man." James said as he rubbed the bruise forming on his stomach. "Still doesn't feel right. And what about the major."

"Fuckin' kill her." Vickers said as simply as if he was stating the weather. "That bitch is fuckin' crazy."

"What?" James asked incredulously. "That's your solution to me not wanting to outright EXECUTE someone?"

Vickers nodded. "Yep." He said. "Saw her get interviewed by the King's people. She is grade-A nutso. Got a feeling you'd save everyone on both sides a lot of trouble if you just walked over to her cell and gave her a triple tap."

"Dude." James said in disgust.

Vickers held his hands up in a "what are you gonna do?" gesture.

"Hey, you were the one that actually spoke to her out on the sands." Vickers said as he leaned back. "You saw how blood thirsty she was. Even said so yourself. During the interview she was all rank, name, D.O.D. number and that's it. She's a fuckin zealot man. Hooah dialed all the way to eleven and then snapped off trying to go even further."

"That doesn't mean she deserves execution." James said uncomfortably.

"No. THAT doesn't." Vickers agreed. "But openly committing an act of war against an allied nation and giving orders that are war crimes in all but technicality do. She'd get the needle back on Earth, that's for sure." He nodded a bit. "Least beheading is a bit quicker."

"I still shouldn't be the one holding the axe." James said in exasperation. He hated that Vickers was right.

"No." Vickers admitted. "But it looks like the legalese says you gotta. And if it keeps our guys from sending over a nuke, or the King from sending a bunch of Elementals to home, then.... well... it's a small sacrifice from one guy for a bit less bloodshed." His eyes darkened as he recalled something he'd never tell James, or anyone else for that matter. "I've done worse for less." He admitted.

The two of them sat in tense silence for several minutes while James held his head in his hands and thought.

"Fuck." He said after a while.

"Yeah." Vickers agreed.

"I gotta go read that paperwork." James said.

"That'll be a nice change for you." Vickers replied.

"Fuck off." James shot back venomously as he grabbed his uniform jacket and stood up. "First I gotta go hit the healers. I think that punch knocked something loose again. At least it feels that way."

"It was a clean shot though." Vickers said as he also stood up, flexing his hand and forming some frost on it as he did. "Gotta admit that much."

"I'll get you back for that by the way." James said in response as he gingerly opened the door.

"Sure you will." Vickers said with a devilish grin.

Behind them the communication hub sat silently.

A small red light pulsed on the back of it. It had been pulsing ever since the table it was on had felt an impact from the two men fighting.

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"Was that a Trullbyr?" Artair asked as he wiped some of its gore off of his left hand scimitar with some of the creatures fur.

"Yes." Kor'Os replied as she cleaned her own great-sword with a rag and then tossed it into the new bonfire. "They're common enough this close to the Druidic lands."

"I though they were supposed to be tougher than that?" He said in a disappointing tone. "But that was remarkably easy."

Kor'Os nodded. "Having a drake that can breath fire made it a lot easier. Usually it's a matter of outlasting the thing until you can get a flame into an open wound."

"That's another thing." Artair said. "I thought they were fireproof?"

Kor'Os used her short sword to lop off one of the beasts six legs and lifted the limb up so he could see. Artair cringed at the admittedly disgusting display.

"Their outer hide is incredibly fire RESISTANT." She said in the same tone she used when training new scout recruits. "And if I had some vinegar and salt I'd save as much of the hide as I could. It makes for great cloaks. both fireproof and incredibly insulated. But I don't, so fire it is." She pointed at the layer of fat underneath its thick skin. "Their fat is what made that work. About as flammable as any oil out there. Hence the new bonfire. That'll burn all night." She said before tossing the limb on top of its former body.

"Still. That wasn't exactly a dangerous fight." Artair said. "I thought trullbyr were incredibly deadly."

"To someone unskilled or unarmed they certainly are." She replied with a smile. "You saw the claws, the rows of teeth in its mouth. If it had caught us unaware it would have been a bad time for at least one of us. Probably you."

"Whatever." Artair said simply. "Any chance there are more?"

"Unlikely." She replied. "They are incredibly territorial, and only share their territory for mating purposes. Once they do the deed they're back to fighting over their space." She tilted her head. "Sometimes they don't even wait to finish."

"Well now that's just rude." The prince said as he turned and went back to making his tent. "Oh uh... Commander." He said a moment later.

"Hmm?" She said as she watched the creature burn inside its own skin, happy that they wouldn't need to worry about it regenerating and being a threat again later.

"It kind of ruined your tent." He said, pointing to the canvas of her tents roof, and a broken support as well.

"Dammit." She said as she made her way over. "That was my good one." She said as she pulled up the broken one, which was splintered half way. Then she pulled on the canvas and it made a squelching sound as it came out of the mud that one of the creatures feet had stamped it into deeply.

"My tent will have more than enough space if you'd like to share." He offered with obvious discomfort.

"Not necessary." She said simply. "I have spares."

"Oh. Good." He said with a polite smile. She didn't know it but he was glad that she wouldn't see him in his sleeping gear. "I'll get back to making my tent than."

"Same." She said as she pulled a spare support pole and a folded square of canvas to replace the dirtied one until she could clean it.

Thirty minutes later she was sitting comfortably next to the fire of the beast's burning body, using the flames to warm some tea while a fish from the nearby pond that the prince had mentioned. He was still struggling to set up his tent.

"Do you need help?" She asked as she sipped at the tea to see how it was doing.

"No?" He said with annoyance. "I do this all the time." He added, while not admitting that he typically stayed at inns or taverns instead.

"I can tell." She replied as she set the tea back down to warm some more. She didn't look forward to trullbyr smoked fish. But it was better than jerky or bottomless bag preserved bread for the millionth time. The drake leaned against a tree nearby snacking on some creature it had caught at some point while she'd been bow fishing.

She sipped her tea as she looked over the expanse of land at the massive, slightly glowing, tree that marked the druid's land in the distance.

She wondered if they knew anything about what had happened back in the village. Or if maybe they might be attacked by it at some point.

"Hey. Ummmm. Your.... highness?" She called awkwardly.

There was a clatter of noise as something inside the tent was dropped, and she heard him swear in what she thought was old Frisian before his head popped out of the tent's door flap.

"What?" He asked. "And don't call me that. Call me Artair if you want. Or if that makes you uncomfortable than call me rider. It's common enough."

"Think the druids would know anything about the blight thing?" She asked. "And should we warn them about it."

He considered the notion for a moment, then simply shook his head.

"No." He said as he withdrew back into the tent. She heard him heave something up for a moment. Then he stepped back out with a large pot in his hands. "They likely already know something went wrong there. What with being in communion with nature. And an entire elvish forest home being destroyed? They've likely already sent some of their people to investigate. And my father has already met with them. They know only about as much about the blight as anyone else does." He shrugged a bit. "Big debate amongst them as to whether or not the blight patches can be considered NATURAL or not too."

Before she could say anything he'd set the pot next to the fire and grabbed her fish by the stick she'd skewered it on.

"Hey!" She cried out as he pulled a piece off and tasted it.

Artair immediately made a face and she couldn't help but smile a bit at his disgust.

"Ugh. Tastes like old shoe leather that's been burnt." He said with a shake of his head. He quickly handed her the stick which she snatched out of his hand. "You eat that?" He asked.

"Beats jerky and stale bread." She replied angrily as she inspected the piece of the fish where he'd taken his piece from. "Besides, it's not cooked all the way."

He shuddered. "Toss that to Xha and go catch a few more." He said. "I'll start a second fire while you do. I assume that flavors from the beast. Yeah?"

She nodded. "Don't need a second fire." She said. "Ones enough."

"Not if that fire poisons our food." He replied, hastily taking the pot back from the side of the blaze. "I'll make another."

"What is that anyways?" She asked while pointing at the pot.

He looked at the pot and smiled. "It's this new dish from up north. It's called white shell chowder." Then he pointed at the fish in her hand, his smile fading. "Now seriously, give that to Xha, catch a few more. We'll cook em on a PROPER fire and add them to the pot. I've done it before. It'll be great."

She looked at the burning Trullbyr. She supposed a second fire wouldn't hurt anything. After all it wasn't like the WEREN'T going to have this one going the whole night, and probably the morning.

Reluctantly, she tossed the fish over near the drake. She cut a branch off of a tree, submerged it in the fire, and stalked off toward the pond.

Xhalya sniffed at the fish and recoiled in disgust.

"I know girl." Artair said. "Disgusting. Right?"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zn0ij9/wait_is_this_just_gate_281/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (279/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zh5d03/wait_is_this_just_gate_278/)

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Kor'Os stirred from her half slumber against the prince's back as she felt the drake beneath them begin to slow down.

"What's... what's going on?" She asked groggily. They'd been riding for over two days now.

Prince Artair turned back to face her a bit. "Stopping. Xha's almost at her limit. And so are you." He said. "You've been drooling on my cloak for nearly an hour now. Plus there's a small pond in a mile or so, makes for good fishing."

She looked around a bit and was surprised to see the great Druidic tree off in the distance.

"Wha?" She wondered. "How far have we ridden?"

"Bout three hundred miles." The prince answered. "A few more hours and we'd be in the Bergland marshes. We'll hit them tomorrow."

"Your drake is that fast?" She asked.

"When I need her to be. But mostly she's just got a lot more endurance than most drakes. Hence why we kept riding through the night." He replied. "Do you have your own supplies? Tent? Bedroll? All that? I assume so from a scout."

"I do." She said, patting at the bottomless bag on on her back. "You?"

He gestured at the saddle bags behind her. "All that and more. I'll leave the fishing to you. I assume you're better at it than I am."

"Probably." She replied. "I get the sense that you're not the patient type. What with the storming off on your drake and not listening to common sense."

"That wasn't impatience." He shot back. His face suddenly serious, though she couldn't see it from behind him. "That was understanding an emergency when you see it and acting."

"I still don't understand this... vanishing blight." She admitted as the drake came to a slow halt. Artair waited as she clambered down its side and stepped on the somewhat damp grass. "How can it be the cause of the village's destruction if it's on the other side of the country?"

"Well first of all." The prince began as he climbed down as well, undoing the straps to Xhalya's saddle in the same motion. "It's not JUST on the other side of the country. There are a few patches in other places in Petravus. That's simply the largest and most easily observed due to its proximity to Jadesport." He heaved the saddle onto a downed tree and began rummaging through one of the bags.

Kor'Os unslung her pack and pulled out the small canvas tarp and wooden poles that made up her tent's roof.

"Additionally. I told you about the battle that nearly cost us the crown prince, most of the local Drakrid riders, and a good portion of Jadesport and its garrison." He continued. "Well. That battle was between them and the creatures that came OUT of the blight."

"And you think that happened in the village?" She wondered as she sank the end of one of the poles into the dirt until it hit its crossbeam and stopped. "That some kind of creature emerged from the blight and did all that?"

"It's the only thing that makes sense to me after seeing the aftermath." He replied as he pulled out a massive tent easily four times the size of hers. He looked back the way they came for a moment, then panned around. "Though.... I don't remember there being any documented blight areas around there." He admitted. "And I'm curious as to why it hadn't moved on Waterside as well."

She brushed off the last bit.

"Maybe the villagers killed it." She offered.

The prince shook his head as he finally pulled the last of the tent out. "Doubt it." He said simply. "All the resources we used outside of Jadesport and even then we almost lost. Had to rely on....." He glanced at her, weighing what he should say. "Outside help." He finished. "If that village had managed to defend itself we would have seen signs of it. Magical damage. Burns. Plus the dead body of whatever had attacked. Instead we simply saw a disappeared village. No. They fell unaware of what was happening. Poor bastards."

"Don't sound so heartbroken." She said with a scoff as she ran a piece of rope from one support pole to the other and pressed the end into the ground with a stake.

He looked at her warily.

"I am." He said. "But I didn't know those people except in passing. And if something like this is going to happen, than I'd prefer it happen in a small village like that than in one of the larger cities. It's a tragedy. But not as big a one as it could have been."

She stopped what she was doing to glare at him.

"There were at least three hundred people living in that village." She said in disgust. "If not more. And now they're dead."

"And if that creature had attacked a larger city. Or even a large village. Say one with.... a few hundred more, or a thousand eve. Then that would have been an even larger death toll." He shot back as he pulled a ten foot long, nearly six inch wide, pole from his bag. She stared at it curiously. "Besides. They're not dead. Not really." He said with a look of concern.

"What?" She asked curiously.

"You don't want to know." He said simply. "Though, it'll probably save your life if you do."

Her confused expression deepened as she asked. "What do you mean?"

Artair slammed his pole into the ground just as she had with hers. He took a deep breath before turning to her.

"The things that came out of the blight outside Jadesport?" He asked rhetorically and with a surprisingly sad expression. "Were the things that had gone IN...to the blight. Including the people that had been fighting against them only a few minutes earlier and fell to them."

He tossed the canvas canopy of his tent, which was significantly larger than hers, up over the top of the pole as she realized what he meant.

"By the gods." She said softly.

Suddenly the prince stopped what he was doing. He turned his head at an angle and seemed to listen for something.

She focused on her own hearing and realized what was wrong almost at the same moment that he asked.

"Is it just me? Or is it way too quiet here?"

Then she heard Xhalya rumbling, and felt the air growing hot.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zl8i2b/wait_is_this_just_gate_280/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (279/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zh5bf8/wait_is_this_just_gate_278/) /
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"Bout three hundred miles." The prince answered. "A few more hours and we'd be in the Bergland marshes. We'll hit them tomorrow."

"Your drake is that fast?" She asked.

"When I need her to be. But mostly she's just got a lot more endurance than most drakes. Hence why we kept riding through the night." He replied. "Do you have your own supplies? Tent? Bedroll? All that? I assume so from a scout."

"I do." She said, patting at the bottomless bag on on her back. "You?"

He gestured at the saddle bags behind her. "All that and more. I'll leave the fishing to you. I assume you're better at it than I am."

"Probably." She replied. "I get the sense that you're not the patient type. What with the storming off on your drake and not listening to common sense."

"That wasn't impatience." He shot back. His face suddenly serious, though she couldn't see it from behind him. "That was understanding an emergency when you see it and acting."

"I still don't understand this... vanishing blight." She admitted as the drake came to a slow halt. Artair waited as she clambered down its side and stepped on the somewhat damp grass. "How can it be the cause of the village's destruction if it's on the other side of the country?"

"Well first of all." The prince began as he climbed down as well, undoing the straps to Xhalya's saddle in the same motion. "It's not JUST on the other side of the country. There are a few patches in other places in Petravus. That's simply the largest and most easily observed due to its proximity to Jadesport." He heaved the saddle onto a downed tree and began rummaging through one of the bags.

Kor'Os unslung her pack and pulled out the small canvas tarp and wooden poles that made up her tent's roof.

"Additionally. I told you about the battle that nearly cost us the crown prince, most of the local Drakrid riders, and a good portion of Jadesport and its garrison." He continued. "Well. That battle was between them and the creatures that came OUT of the blight."

"And you think that happened in the village?" She wondered as she sank the end of one of the poles into the dirt until it hit its crossbeam and stopped. "That some kind of creature emerged from the blight and did all that?"

"It's the only thing that makes sense to me after seeing the aftermath." He replied as he pulled out a massive tent easily four times the size of hers. He looked back the way they came for a moment, then panned around. "Though.... I don't remember there being any documented blight areas around there." He admitted. "And I'm curious as to why it hadn't moved on Waterside as well."

She brushed off the last bit.

"Maybe the villagers killed it." She offered.

The prince shook his head as he finally pulled the last of the tent out. "Doubt it." He said simply. "All the resources we used outside of Jadesport and even then we almost lost. Had to rely on....." He glanced at her, weighing what he should say. "Outside help." He finished. "If that village had managed to defend itself we would have seen signs of it. Magical damage. Burns. Plus the dead body of whatever had attacked. Instead we simply saw a disappeared village. No. They fell unaware of what was happening. Poor bastards."

"Don't sound so heartbroken." She said with a scoff as she ran a piece of rope from one support pole to the other and pressed the end into the ground with a stake.

He looked at her warily.

"I am." He said. "But I didn't know those people except in passing. And if something like this is going to happen, than I'd prefer it happen in a small village like that than in one of the larger cities. It's a tragedy. But not as big a one as it could have been."

She stopped what she was doing to glare at him.

"There were at least three hundred people living in that village." She said in disgust. "If not more. And now they're dead."

"And if that creature had attacked a larger city. Or even a larger village. Say one with.... a few hundred more, or a thousand even. Then that would have been an even larger death toll." He shot back as he pulled a ten foot long, nearly six inch wide, pole from his bag. She stared at it curiously. "Besides. They're not dead. Not really." He said with a look of concern.

"What?" She asked curiously.

"You don't want to know." He said simply. "Though, it'll probably save your life if you do."

Her confused expression deepened as she asked. "What do you mean?"

Artair slammed his pole into the ground just as she had with hers. He took a deep breath before turning to her.

"The things that came out of the blight outside Jadesport?" He asked rhetorically and with a surprisingly sad expression. "Were the things that had gone IN...to the blight. Including the people that had been fighting against them only a few minutes earlier and fell to them."

He tossed the canvas canopy of his tent, which was significantly larger than hers, up over the top of the pole as she realized what he meant.

"By the gods." She said softly.

Suddenly the prince stopped what he was doing. He turned his head at an angle and seemed to listen for something.

She focused on her own hearing and realized what was wrong almost at the same moment that he asked.

"Is it just me? Or is it way too quiet here?"

Then she heard Xhalya rumbling, and felt the air growing hot.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zl8g6f/wait_is_this_just_gate_280/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (278/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zgguup/wait_is_this_just_gate_277/)

Writer's note: James's entire approach to life can be summed up with that last line.

Enjoy.

\~

James woke up the next morning just before dawn.

He gently disentangled himself from Amina's long, scar-pocked limbs and quietly went over to the bathroom. She mumbled a bit as she grasped for him in her sleep, then wrapped her arm around his pillow and went back to the tiny snores he'd grown used to.

He did the necessities, all the standard post-sex rituals that any guy would do the next day, then quickly bathed and dressed. He even shaved.

He'd seen the night before just how concerned Amina had been about whatever her father was going to tell him today, and he figured it would be best to get it done early, and as officially as he was able. So, he wore his full duty uniform, though he was starting to run low on the components to do so. He really needed to stop wearing the pants and athletic under shirts that came with it. And he definitely needed more boots.

A few minutes later he stepped out of their bathroom and picked up the last thing he needed to complete the ensemble. He strapped the short, dark, multicolored sword to his belt quietly and crept out of the door after giving Amina's hand a gentle kiss.

The halls were simultaneously bustling with castle staff going about their early morning duties, and eerily silent despite the numerous maids, cleaners, butlers, guards, and whatever else. It was as if

everyone was being as busy as possible, while simultaneously doing everything in their power not to wake anyone up. He subconsciously took to the same silent tempo as he walked, nodding and smiling in greeting at anyone he crossed paths with.

He stopped on his way. He knew from experience with his own NCO's and Officers on Earth, that if bad news or a dressing down were going to occur, certain things could be done to ease the anger on either side. It took nearly ten minutes, but when he recommenced with his short journey he did so with a tray, carrying a small container of milk, some sugar, and two steaming cups of dark black coffee. He didn't know if King Farrick had even tried Earth style coffee yet. But he figured it couldn't hurt to try.

When he arrived at the King's study he'd expected to wait. To be told that the King had yet to rise, or was still dressing.

Instead the two guards simply nodded and moved to open the door for him. He recognized one of them from the old fashioned, large bore, rifle slung over her shoulder.

"He's expecting you sir." The large elf woman said as he passed.

"Thanks." He said back.

King Farrick set down the papers he'd been reading over, James recognized the Presidential seal on them, and gestured for James to sit at the chair in front of his desk even as he moved to sit in his own.

"You're earlier than expected." He said as James set the tray down on the desk. "And you brought beverages?"

James sat down and took a long sip of his coffee, still black, before he spoke. The king looked at the other drink and James had a sense that he was questioning it, then simply picked it up and also took a sip. He grimaced at the bitterness.

James nodded with a small smile. He pointed at the tray. "THAT is why I brought the cream and sugar."

The King set his cup down and picked up the small bottle of milk. "Amina told you didn't she?"

"Not in so many words. But.... I got the message." He replied honestly. "As for the earliness and the coffee. Well, I learned a long time ago that bad news is better BEFORE breakfast. And coffee helps everything."

"It's dreadful." The king said, and James had a feeling that he meant both the news AND the beverage. He sipped at the newly cream laden coffee and then spooned a bit of sugar into it. Another sip and he nodded. "But like anything else it can be made better if done right."

James nodded, but didn't say anything.

"You two are good together." The King continued. "Not like when you first met."

James rubbed his jaw, remembering the encounter. "We've uh.... come a long way."

King Farrick just nodded. "Indeed." He said. "I remember when you seemed to get drunk and end up in trouble at almost every new dawn."

James chuckled. "Starting to wonder why the latter keeps occurring even though I've stopped the former." He said with a grin.

The King nodded. "Trouble rarely cares asks if one is sober when it approaches."

James smiled as he nodded back. "Should engrave that on beer mugs and flasks." He said back. "You'd make a fortune."

The two of them sat like that for a moment, sipping from their respective coffees.

"Have you read the papers that your President had you fill out?" The King asked after a while.

James thought back to the stack of papers he now had sitting on the dresser back in his and Amina's room.

"Not word for word." He said.

The King nodded and held up one of the papers on his desk for emphasis. "I was just finishing up on mine." He set it down and looked at it as if it might attack him. "Very well written. Your world's legal papers."

"I did warn you of that." James reminded him.

"Yes. Yes... YOU... did." The King admitted slowly. "And also of how your world's politicians think and act. How they likely WOULD act." He said. "And every word of warning has ended up ringing true."

James nodded solemnly. "Unfortunately."

"Most." The King agreed. "And under ordinary circumstances I'd be rewarding you greatly for your honest council." He said. "And I shall. But today I'm afraid the only reward I can grant is a grim duty."

James took a deep breath as he braced himself.

"As you know." The King began. "As the new commanding officer of a- I don't know what your world's term for it is- but a military penal unit."

James nodded.

"You are charged with oversight of their punishments and ensuring that they are carried out in an appropriate manner." He paused. "And in

certain circumstances, being the one to carry them out, so as to avoid violence occurring between our two peoples."

And just like that, James knew where this was going.

He close his eyes as he said. "When necessary to avoid uneccessary hostility between our people."

"Just so. And you know what judgment will be passed regarding this Major and her First Sergeant?" The King asked.

James looked up at him suddenly in surprise.

"The First Sergeant too?" He asked, anger flickering in his eyes. "But he's the one that called for the surrender."

"And for that he will LIVE." The King shot back his own eyes growing in anger even as they hardened somewhat. "But he still took part in leading the people under his command against the Kingdom, and against his own country's allies in an illegal act of war."

James's jaw clenched even as he felt himself deflate.

"What's...What are their sentences?" He asked. His eyes shutting as he waited for the answer.

"For the Major." The King began. "Death."

James recoiled as if struck, he leaned over and placed his face in his hand as he heard the news. He'd expected it. But it still felt wrong to him.

"And for the First Sergeant. A flogging. Twenty lashes." The King finished.

"Lashes?" James asked as he looked at the King. He felt his breathing quicken. "I have to whip someone? Someone who did what they could to save people? To stop the battle?"

"Someone who could have done so before the battle ever started." The King said sternly. "Who could have arrested the Major, who's clearly some kind of psychotic, and ordered the surrender before any attacks even occurred." He took a deep breath of his own. "As I have said. His actions have earned him mercy. Had he not ordered the surrender he would be joining the Major under the headsman's axe. And HAD he ordered it later he would have been receiving forty, or maybe even time in the stocks on top of it."

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"I can't..." He began. "I can't do that." He said in between breaths. "It's not that simple for us.... For soldiers.... Especially life l-"

He was cut off by a sudden **SLAM!** of the King's hand on the desk. The tray with the coffee rattled from the impact as the King stared at him and pointed the finger of the hand at him.

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"But why me?" James asked. "Why do I have to carry them out?"

King Farrick sat back, looking suddenly weary and apathetic.

"Because it is the agreement that your President and I have come to." He answered. "The long and short of it is; no more military blood spilled by the other nation. My people are allowed to defend themselves if it comes to it. Just as yours are. But outside of that, no killing. Earth blood may only be INTENTIONALLY spilled by Earth citizens. And Petravian blood by Petravian citizens." He gestured at James. "Plus you signed the papers. You yourself agreed to this."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zkewgg/wait_is_this_just_gate_279/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (278/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zggt64/wait_is_this_just_gate_277/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zketlc/wait_is_this_just_gate_279/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (277/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zfbzib/wait_is_this_just_gate_276/)

Writer's note: Remember where I said that the doctor looks like Avaserala? Well, now that's really the case.

Also, I may or may not come back and put a >!PANCAKE!< *section in after the first part later. Maybe. Who knows? I sure don't. We'll see.*

Enjoy.

\~

When James arrived at their room that night he did so to the sight of Amina sullenly pulling off her armor. She looked at him briefly before turning back to the task at hand, and once James had put down the box and the stack of papers he moved to help her.

Despite the bandages and ointments the healers had used, some of which she was still using under her clothes, James could still see countless bruises and small pockmarks from the bullets she'd been hit by. It was a gruesome and painful reminder of what they'd been through. He even still had some bruising around the hole that had scarred over in his abdomen.

Once her armor was completely off James grabbed the small tin of ointment from their nightstand and rubbed some onto his hands. To him it smelled like candied yams and strawberry. Though a discreet taste-test while Amina hadn't been looking one day had revealed that it definitely didn't taste like them. Once he'd spread a good amount on his hands he began applying it to some of the bruises on Amina's back. She winced at the first touch of the cold paste to her bruised flesh.

"Sorry." He said. "What'd your father want?"

"It's okay." She said as she pulled her hair over her shoulder and out of his way. "And he just had some bad news."

James peered around at her as she looked away.

"Everything okay?" He asked as he spread some of the balm to a bruised bullet wound just under her shoulder blade. The muscle there spasmed a bit and he gently pressed his thumb into it and kneaded it a bit to calm it down. "Anything I should worry about?"

Amina grunted and grit her teeth a bit as he massaged the upset muscle. "Yes. But I've been told to let him tell you about it. He wants you to come see him in the morning." She replied honestly.

"Something bad enough that he wants me prepped, rested and relaxed first?" James said as he took a bit more ointment out of the tin and passed it to her. She took it and began applying some to the bruises on her ribs. "That's not good."

"No." She agreed. "You're going to hate it."

James nodded as he pressed some of the ointment into a line of scar tissue and bruises that ran from just under her left breast to the back of her ribs, some kind of long graze from the battle.

"Anything to do with the P.O.W.'s?" He asked. "That meeting was the President- that's my country's leader- giving me command of them until further notice."

She looked back at him curiously. "He gave you command of a bunch of prisoners?" She asked. "Why?"

"It's... a thing when it comes to prisoners of war in our world." He said with a shrug. "The prisoners are supposed to default to the command of the highest ranking among them. But since there are civilian personnel, and because the military members are from multiple branches they chose me instead. Mostly because I'm now the highest ranking soldier around, AND because I'm not ACTUALLY a prisoner."

She considered the idea for a moment.

"What kind of responsibilities does it entail?" She asked. as she rubbed some ointment on her collarbone.

"Mostly just standard day to day type stuff." He replied as he finished with the scar on her side and wrapped his wolf hand around her waist. With his other hand he pulled her belt down just a bit to inspect a scar he knew was just beneath it, but it was lighter than the rest and she didn't react to the discomfort, so he left it and tended to a different one. "Keeping them on a PT schedule, making sure they remain presentable, follow the orders of the guards. So on and so forth."

Suddenly she grabbed the ointment hand, and placed her other hand on his wolf hand.

"And what about punishment?" She asked.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"If a punishment needs to be doled out to any of them. What's your role in its administration?"

He thought for a moment. He and the President HAD spoken of such a thing.

"If the punishment is just and fair. I'm to oversee it's application and ensure that its done in an appropriate manner." He recalled. "Extra duty, half rations, isolation. Whatever it might be. I'm also supposed to offer alternatives to anything deemed unnecessary or cruel. And outright resist anything that breaks the new peace agreement our two leaders signed earlier today."

"Do you carry out any of these punishments?" She asked, looking away. "Is that part of the job too?"

James looked at her curiously, and with mounting concern.

"Amina. What's this about?" He asked. "Is this about the bad news?"

She took a deep breath. "I told you I'm not supposed to tell you." She said after a moment of thought.

The reminder was, itself, an admission.

James pulled her close to him and wrapped his left arm around her. With his other hand he pulled her face to look at him.

The two of them stared at each other for several long seconds.

Then James just nodded slightly. "Well... We'll deal with it." He said. "That's what we do."

And he pulled her face toward him.

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Samantha gripped the bar on the squat machine and lifted it on her shoulders, surprised at how light the weight felt.. She kicked the safety bar into its off position and proceeded to lower herself down until her knees were at ninety degrees.

Her newly rearranged leg bones made the position awkward, and she felt like she was simultaneously on the verge of falling forward, AND breaking her ankles.

Still. She had nearly a thousand pounds on the machine. Doctor Munro and one of the physical therapists that ran the exercise room looked on in awe as she did ten reps of the weight and then lifted it back up high enough to reengage the safety.

"That's nine ninety." The young man said after a soft whistle. "Any more than that and I'm gonna have to start piling on the free weights. How's it feel?"

She looked at the bars on the side, and all the forty five pound weights still rocking slightly on it. Then she rubbed her shoulder and felt no soreness there where the bar had rested. Her legs felt fine too, despite the awkwardness they'd caused.

"My old squat weight felt heavier." She replied. "You know.... before.... this."

He nodded. "Matches the bench, deadlift, and curls." He said. "In medical terms; you're strong as hell now."

"Thank you Doctor Barnes." Dr. Munro said. Then she turned to Samantha. "How do you feel?"

She shrugged, her black hoodie sagging a bit as her ears pressed back and down.

"Less.... like a human." She said softly. "But.... it's cool I guess."

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"Say it." The Doctor said. "What does it look like?"

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"No it's not!" Samantha yelled back as she stepped back.

"Then turn back into a human." The doctor demanded. "If you're not a wolf, then turn human now!"

Samantha stared at her.

"I... I can't!" She admitted.

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"But are you? Be truthful. Not just to me. But to you."

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Samantha looked at the wreckage as she panted heavily, her mouth hanging open as she did.

"Look at how strong you can be Ms. Jenkins." Doctor Munro said, snapping Samantha's attention back to her. "Now imagine if you acknowledged that fact, and controlled it. A HUMAN can't do that." She said as she pointed at the wreckage. "Monsters aren't monsters because of how they look, but how they act."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (277/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zfbxhw/wait_is_this_just_gate_276/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Remember where I said that the doctor looks like Avaserala? Well, now that's really the case.

Also, I may or may not come back and put a >!PANCAKE!< *section in after the first part later. Maybe. Who knows? I sure don't. We'll see.*

Enjoy.

\~

When James arrived at their room that night he did so to the sight of Amina sullenly pulling off her armor. She looked at him briefly before turning back to the task at hand, and once James had put down the box and the stack of papers he moved to help her.

Despite the bandages and ointments the healers had used, some of which she was still using under her clothes, James could still see countless bruises and small pockmarks from the bullets she'd been hit by. It was a gruesome and painful reminder of what they'd been through. He even still had some bruising around the hole that had scarred over in his abdomen.

Once her armor was completely off James grabbed the small tin of ointment from their nightstand and rubbed some onto his hands. To him it smelled like candied yams and strawberry. Though a discreet taste-test while Amina hadn't been looking one day had revealed that it definitely didn't taste like them. Once he'd spread a good amount on his hands he began applying it to some of the bruises on Amina's back. She winced at the first touch of the cold paste to her bruised flesh.

"Sorry." He said. "What'd your father want?"

"It's okay." She said as she pulled her hair over her shoulder and out of his way. "And he just had some bad news."

James peered around at her as she looked away.

"Everything okay?" He asked as he spread some of the balm to a bruised bullet wound just under her shoulder blade. The muscle there spasmed a bit and he gently pressed his thumb into it and kneaded it a bit to calm it down. "Anything I should worry about?"

Amina grunted and grit her teeth a bit as he massaged the upset muscle. "Yes. But I've been told to let him tell you about it. He wants you to come see him in the morning." She replied honestly.

"Something bad enough that he wants me prepped, rested and relaxed first?" James said as he took a bit more ointment out of the tin and passed it to her. She took it and began applying some to the bruises on her ribs. "That's not good."

"No." She agreed. "You're going to hate it."

James nodded as he pressed some of the ointment into a line of scar tissue and bruises that ran from just under her left breast to the back of her ribs, some kind of long graze from the battle.

"Anything to do with the P.O.W.'s?" He asked. "That meeting was the President- that's my country's leader- giving me command of them until further notice."

She looked back at him curiously. "He gave you command of a bunch of prisoners?" She asked. "Why?"

"It's... a thing when it comes to prisoners of war in our world." He said with a shrug. "The prisoners are supposed to default to the command of the highest ranking among them. But since there are civilian personnel, and because the military members are from multiple branches they chose me instead. Mostly because I'm now the highest ranking soldier around, AND because I'm not ACTUALLY a prisoner."

She considered the idea for a moment.

"What kind of responsibilities does it entail?" She asked. as she rubbed some ointment on her collarbone.

"Mostly just standard day to day type stuff." He replied as he finished with the scar on her side and wrapped his wolf hand around her waist. With his other hand he pulled her belt down just a bit to inspect a scar he knew was just beneath it, but it was lighter than the rest and she didn't react to the discomfort, so he left it and tended to a different one. "Keeping them on a PT schedule, making sure they remain presentable, follow the orders of the guards. So on and so forth."

Suddenly she grabbed the ointment hand, and placed her other hand on his wolf hand.

"And what about punishment?" She asked.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"If a punishment needs to be doled out to any of them. What's your role in its administration?"

He thought for a moment. He and the President HAD spoken of such a thing.

"If the punishment is just and fair. I'm to oversee it's application and ensure that its done in an appropriate manner." He recalled. "Extra duty, half rations, isolation. Whatever it might be. I'm also supposed to offer alternatives to anything deemed unnecessary or cruel. And outright resist anything that breaks the new peace agreement our two leaders signed earlier today."

"Do you carry out any of these punishments?" She asked, looking away. "Is that part of the job too?"

James looked at her curiously, and with mounting concern.

"Amina. What's this about?" He asked. "Is this about the bad news?"

She took a deep breath. "I told you I'm not supposed to tell you." She said after a moment of thought.

The reminder was, itself, an admission.

James pulled her close to him and wrapped his left arm around her. With his other hand he pulled her face to look at him.

The two of them stared at each other for several long seconds.

Then James just nodded slightly. "Well... We'll deal with it." He said. "That's what we do."

And he pulled her face toward him.

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Samantha gripped the bar on the squat machine and lifted it on her shoulders, surprised at how light the weight felt.. She kicked the safety bar into its off position and proceeded to lower herself down until her knees were at ninety degrees.

Her newly rearranged leg bones made the position awkward, and she felt like she was simultaneously on the verge of falling forward, AND breaking her ankles.

Still. She had nearly a thousand pounds on the machine. Doctor Munro and one of the physical therapists that ran the exercise room looked on in awe as she did ten reps of the weight and then lifted it back up high enough to reengage the safety.

"That's nine ninety." The young man said after a soft whistle. "Any more than that and I'm gonna have to start piling on the free weights. How's it feel?"

She looked at the bars on the side, and all the forty five pound weights still rocking slightly on it. Then she rubbed her shoulder and felt no soreness there where the bar had rested. Her legs felt fine too, despite the awkwardness they'd caused.

"My old squat weight felt heavier." She replied. "You know.... before.... this."

He nodded. "Matches the bench, deadlift, and curls." He said. "In medical terms; you're strong as hell now."

"Thank you Doctor Barnes." Dr. Munro said. Then she turned to Samantha. "How do you feel?"

She shrugged, her black hoodie sagging a bit as her ears pressed back and down.

"Less.... like a human." She said softly. "But.... it's cool I guess."

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zemzn3/wait_is_this_just_gate_275/)

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Enjoy.

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And he was exhausted.

At least it wasn't a massive promotion this time. He thought to himself. *Just command of an entire company of prisoners and de facto supervision of the civilian prisoners they brought with them.* He gulped. *No biggie.*

He walked the few doors down to the summoning room and greeted the guards, informing them that he was expecting a package. They logged it in their records and let him in. Sure enough when he got inside he saw the interior guards inspecting a small styrofoam box that was on the floor.

He said it was a wedding present. James thought. *But I think I should probably inspect it. He might be the president but I'm not dumb enough to trust him explicitly.*

James greeted the two guards inspecting the box and asked if he could see it. They nodded and he picked it up. Inside was a nice dark wooden box. The top of it bore a pyrographed version of the presidential seal, and the lid had a simple brass clasp.

He gingerly undid the clasp, bracing himself in case his suspicions were correct. When nothing happened he slowly opened the lid, waiting for a tell tale click or pop.

But the lid simply opened.

James looked inside at the blue velvet lined interior, and the two large items inside.

\["Holy shit."\] He said in surprise, slipping back into English without realizing it. The two guards looked at him before peering into the box. "Sorry." He said to them. "Just one hell of a gift."

Still, he had to do his diligence. James lifted the box onto one of the tables near the door and set to dismantling it as far as he could go. He held each of the two items in turn, examining them and admiring their finish before gently setting them down. Then he removed the padding of the box, which did end up concealing several small boxes, though the contents of the boxes were somewhat expected given the two items that comprised the gift.

The two boxes were, fortunately, the only surprise the box had in store for him. He'd have Vickers give it a once over whenever he saw him but, as far as he could tell, it was safe. He put everything back in place and took the box with him out the door.

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"It's not meant to be liked." King Farrick replied as he poured himself some tea. "It's meant to buy peace and punish him without LOOKING like a punishment."

"But James didn't do anything wrong." She said. "He went there to try to maintain peace. It's not his fault that his own people opened fire."

Her father sighed as he rested his hands on the table and leaned on it, his head hanging.

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"If Kela had been the one to do it, I would have trusted her judgment." She answered.

"Yes." He agreed. "YOU... would have. But what about Sigbert? Or Alixan?" He considered the latter. "Well, maybe not Alixan. But still, what would the other Generals have thought? What would the Guardian Lord have thought? What would they have assumed?"

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"Josephito?" She cried as she spun around.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zggt64/wait_is_this_just_gate_277/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (275/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zdoscm/wait_is_this_just_gate_274/)

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"Captain Choi." The guard hailed. The three of them stopped.

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"Mom." James said. "Head on back to your room for a bit. We'll see what's going on." She nodded awkwardly then slowly made to walk away. "Thank you Sergeant." He said to the guard.

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He waited the minute or so for it to boot up all the way. Then a video chat opened up.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zdopd6/wait_is_this_just_gate_274/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Writer's note: Played a weekend long Apocalypse 40k event this weekend. 4000PL per side. So I am fuckin [exhausted](https://empathmeetsanime.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/same-energy-c.jpg) *my dudes. No energy for witty notes. Writing. Stuff happens. Enjoy.*

^(INB4 y'all tell me to take my time. I did. And now here we are.)

\~

James poked lightly at the dark spot at the base of his ribs. It ached underneath, but the skin was smooth and soft, and a shade lighter than the area around it.

"Any pain?" The healer asked as they inspected the matching spot on James's back. They prodded it with their finger.

James grunted. "A bit. Like a bruise or something."

"No pain in the bones though? Not feeling anything that feels.... Loose? Or like it's moving when it shouldn't?"

James shook his head. "No. No just tender."

"How about the rest of you?" His mother asked from where she was watching nearby.

James just shook his head again. "I'm fine mom." He said. "Got my bell rung and broke a bunch of stuff. But... I'm fine." He looked over to the other bed nearby. "Hon?" He asked.

Amina winced as the healer attending her maneuvered her left arm up above her head, as if trying to high five someone. At the apex her expression soured as she strained against the torn muscles that were still healing. "I'm fine." She said.

"Debatable." The healer countered. "You've still got partially torn muscles in both shoulders and in your legs. And the only reason none of those... " They referenced the medical reports that the previous healers had left on the princess. "Bullets. Still a weird word.....Anyways the only reason they didn't kill you is because you entered a Fury-State. If it hadn't been for that, you would have ended up like all the other soldiers. That and your shield kept MOST of the damage from getting through to anything important."

The Healer gripped Amina's head and turned her head to the side and jabbed at a scar that ran just past the end of her eyebrow.

"This one right here only needed a few inches and it would have taken your bad eye." The healer continued. "But, lucky you, it was just a graze."

Amina shook the man's hand off and grunted as she stood up.

"I've had torn muscles before." She said. "Broken bones too." She pointed at the bad eye in question. "In fact I've had worse before and I didn't even get to take part in THAT fight. I'll be fine."

The healer scowled a bit. "At least return for your last few regenerative sessions and physical reconditioning checks. And don't forget to bandage before bed." He said. "No questions."

"Fine." Amina said as she slid back into her breastplate and clasped it in place.

"You're good to go Captain Choi." The young Orc healer attending to him said. "Same thing though. Last few check ups, no questions." Then the healer muttered under their breath. ^("Still don't know how you survived that though.")

James nodded as he looked over his shoulder at them in confusion. "Got it. Thanks."

With that James stood up and took Amina's hand. His mother walked beside them as they made their way down the hall.

"I'm glad you're doing better mijo." She said after a few minutes. "I was so worried when I saw them bring you in." She looked past him. "You too Amina."

"I know mom. Sorry 'bout that." He replied.

"Thank you Mrs. Choi." Amina said with a smile.

"Now. Why did you ask me to join you?" His mother asked. "I mean, I'm glad to see you two doing better. But I could do without seeing the Healing Ward for a bit."

James chuckled. His mother had basically become the go to expert when it came to treating gun shot wounds. As a result she had spent most of the past few weeks in and out of the ward in question to help with the recovering Petravian soldiers.

"Well. We've gotta go shopping today." He said.

"Oh yes." Amina said with a smile. "I've got to take you to my favorite tailor."

His mother looked at both of them with furrowed eyebrows. "Why?"

"Well." James began. "Remember how Amina and I are engaged?"

His mother's eyes widened and she smiled. "It's finally happening?"

James nodded as he felt Amina bump into him.

"Yeah we've gotten tired of emergencies and surprise attacks and things delaying it over and over. So we asked King Farrick to speed things up a bit." He pointed at a pair of castle staff members who were carrying a massive bolt of crimson and gold cloth down the hall. "Prep is underway right now. It happens in about a week and a half."

"Oh mijo!" His mother exclaimed as she wrapped him in a hug that felt like it was going to re-break a few of his bones. "I'm so excited!" Then she quickly wrapped her arms around Amina in a similar hug.

"Ow." Amina mouthed over his mother's shoulder.

James smiled.

"Okay mom. Let her breath." James said as he took his moms shoulder and guided her out of the killing embrace. "Now come on. Let's get you a wedding outfit. You'll be sitting in front of all the rich folk of the land."

"Shouldn't we bring your brother?" She asked. Then her smile faltered "Or you know.... once he's better?"

James wrapped his arm around his mom's shoulder.

"Mom, he'll be okay. He just needs a bit of time to process. And for us to help him when he's ready." He said with a smile. "Besides. I already took him to MY tailor for his wedding outfit. This is all about you."

"What?" She asked. "He already has his?"

"Been in my closet since before the whole desert thing went down." He said. "Now come on. Amina's gonna show you the good stuff when it comes to clothes. And IIIII am gonna grab the ingredients for grandma's chile verde." He said. "Gonna have to B.S. the beans though. Cause I do not recall ever seeing any since I got here." He paused in his tracks as he tried to come to terms with that sudden realization.

He turned to look at Amina.

"Hon. Does Petravus NOT have beans?" He asked, suddenly concerned.

"What are beans?" She asked in return.

Next to her Mrs. Choi's mouth dropped open as she heard the new info about the world she was now in.

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"Are you ready Samantha?" Dr. Munro asked. "We can hold off if you want to."

Samantha nodded, the hood of her jacket bouncing a little as she did. Her hands clenched on the leg of her sweatpants and she could feel the nails there straining at the cloth of her gloves.

"Okay." The doctor said. "Remember; it's just the two of them and a security officer for safety reasons. No cameras or anything."

"You mean in case I hurt anyone?" Samantha asked.

Dr. Munro frowned a bit.

"In case anyone tries to hurt you." She answered. "Or in case anyone tries to get in besides Mr. Morgan or Mr. Laurent. We're still not allowing press or anyone else in yet. This is only happening because I thought it might help you. Even lawyers and government officials are being stonewalled until you've been brought back into a.... state of stability."

Samantha looked over at the doctor, despite her eyes being concealed by her hood.

"So I'm unstable?" She asked.

Dr. Munro just stared at her emotionally. "Aren't you?" She asked back.

Samantha thought about it for a moment. Then simply turned back.

"I'm glad we were at least able to get you in touch with your father." The doctor said a moment later as she walked over to the wall and prepared to open the blinds there. "And I'm glad he took it so well."

She nodded. "Thank you for that by the way."

"Of course." Dr Munro replied. "Now are you ready?"

Samantha gulped. This would be her first time talking to anyone in person besides the doctor since being brought to the hospital.

She nodded and Dr. Munro pulled the chain that withdrew the curtains.

On the other side of the window were a middle aged black man in a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt, and a scrawny young white guy that she thought might have been in high school, wearing hole-ridden jeans and a shirt that had some kind of scrabbly black band logo on it. In the corner stood a large man in a police-like outfit wearing a vest with HOSPITAL SECURITY on the front doing everything he could to look like he wasn't looking at Samantha.

Samantha Jenkins on the other hand, looked like an professional linebacker wearing their workout sweat gear. She was dressed head to toe

in the largest set of black sweatpants and black hoodie that the staff could find. The hood was drawn over her face and cinched tight enough that she could only see a few inches around her new snout. Her hands were bundled into a set of leather gloves that didn't even reach her wrists, and pressed into the hoodie's belly pouch. They hadn't been able to find any shoes that fit the shape of her new feet, so they'd simply put some of the hospital's grippy socks on them instead.

"Woah." Said the young punk. "That's not intimidating at all."

Jenkins winced and withdrew even as the other man elbowed the younger one in the ribs.

"What?" He asked as he rubbed his ribs. "She looks like a freaking werewolf ninja. It's badass."

The older man simply sighed and rolled his eyes. "Good afternoon Ms. Jenkins." He said in his Hispanic accent. "Do you remember us?"

Samantha nodded. "Course I do." She said. "Hard to forget something like that." She pointed at one then the other with her gloved hand. "Wizard." She said as she pointed at him. "Bargain bin Hulk."

"Hey!" The younger man said. "If anything. Being the hulk IN REAL LIFE makes me the better hulk than any actor ever was. Also, real rich coming from a 'BARGAIN BIN' Wonder Woman." He said while making air quotes around the words.

"ANYWAYS." Said the older man. "We wanted to come see how you were doing. And the Doctor here thought that might be a good idea. Shared experience and all. I'm Damarius Laurent. This is-"

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A.P. shrugged. "President called it a 'magical experiment' gone wrong." He said. "Oh yeah. He totally admitted that magic is a thing now. So, that's new."

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"Admitted we exist." Laurent said. "Hasn't said much else about it. I'm honestly surprised he even admitted that that facility you were at was messing with magic. People are calling us the first Super Heroes though."

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"Speaking of wolves." A.P. began. "Why are you and the others so different? Like... why weren't you trying to kill people like they were."

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"I hadn't told you yet. I wasn't going to until you were in a better state of mind." She said as Samantha turned to look at her. "But you aren't the only werewolf that turned on the others. And also, not the only one that was subsequently brought into the hospital for observation and treatment."

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"Well." A.P. said. "Kinda.... I mean.... None of them were superheroes like you were." He pointed. "Also I think your tail's wagging."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (274/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/zb0oi5/wait_is_this_just_gate_273/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Played a weekend long Apocalypse 40k event this weekend. 4000PL per side. So I am fuckin
[exhausted](https://empathmeetsanime.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/same-energy-c.jpg) *my dudes. No energy for witty notes. Writing. Stuff happens. Enjoy.*

^(INB4 y'all tell me to take my time. I did. And now here we are.)

\~

James poked lightly at the dark spot at the base of his ribs. It ached underneath, but the skin was smooth and soft, and a shade lighter than the area around it.

"Any pain?" The healer asked as they inspected the matching spot on James's back. They prodded it with their finger.

James grunted. "A bit. Like a bruise or something."

"No pain in the bones though? Not feeling anything that feels.... Loose? Or like it's moving when it shouldn't?"

James shook his head. "No. No just tender."

"How about the rest of you?" His mother asked from where she was watching nearby.

James just shook his head again. "I'm fine mom." He said. "Got my bell rung and broke a bunch of stuff. But... I'm fine." He looked over to the other bed nearby. "Hon?" He asked.

Amina winced as the healer attending her maneuvered her left arm up above her head, as if trying to high five someone. At the apex her expression soured as she strained against the torn muscles that were still healing. "I'm fine." She said.

"Debatable." The healer countered. "You've still got partially torn muscles in both shoulders and in your legs. And the only reason none of those... " They referenced the medical reports that the previous healers had left on the princess. "Bullets. Still a weird word.....Anyways the only reason they didn't kill you is because you entered a Fury-State. If it hadn't been for that, you would have ended up like all the other soldiers. That and your shield kept MOST of the damage from getting through to anything important."

The Healer gripped Amina's head and turned her head to the side and jabbed at a scar that ran just past the end of her eyebrow.

"This one right here only needed a few inches and it would have taken your bad eye." The healer continued. "But, lucky you, it was just a graze."

Amina shook the man's hand off and grunted as she stood up.

"I've had torn muscles before." She said. "Broken bones too." She pointed at the bad eye in question. "In fact I've had worse before and I didn't even get to take part in THAT fight. I'll be fine."

The healer scowled a bit. "At least return for your last few regenerative sessions and physical reconditioning checks. And don't forget to bandage before bed." He said. "No questions."

"Fine." Amina said as she slid back into her breastplate and clasped it in place.

"You're good to go Captain Choi." The young Orc healer attending to him said. "Same thing though. Last few check ups, no questions." Then the healer muttered under their breath. "^(Still don't know how you survived that though.")

James nodded as he looked over his shoulder at them in confusion. "Got it. Thanks."

With that James stood up and took Amina's hand. His mother walked beside them as they made their way down the hall.

"I'm glad you're doing better mijo." She said after a few minutes. "I was so worried when I saw them bring you in." She looked past him. "You too Amina."

"I know mom. Sorry 'bout that." He replied.

"Thank you Mrs. Choi." Amina said with a smile.

"Now. Why did you ask me to join you?" His mother asked. "I mean, I'm glad to see you two doing better. But I could do without seeing the Healing Ward for a bit."

James chuckled. His mother had basically become the go to expert when it came to treating gun shot wounds. As a result she had spent most of the past few weeks in and out of the ward in question to help with the recovering Petravian soldiers.

"Well. We've gotta go shopping today." He said.

"Oh yes." Amina said with a smile. "I've got to take you to my favorite tailor."

His mother looked at both of them with furrowed eyebrows. "Why?"

"Well." James began. "Remember how Amina and I are engaged?"

His mother's eyes widened and she smiled. "It's finally happening?"

James nodded as he felt Amina bump into him.

"Yeah we've gotten tired of emergencies and surprise attacks and things delaying it over and over. So we asked King Farrick to speed things up a bit." He pointed at a pair of castle staff members who were carrying a massive bolt of crimson and gold cloth down the hall. "Prep is underway right now. It happens in about a week and a half."

"Oh mijo!" His mother exclaimed as she wrapped him in a hug that felt like it was going to re-break a few of his bones. "I'm so excited!" Then she quickly wrapped her arms around Amina in a similar hug.

"Ow." Amina mouthed over his mother's shoulder.

James smiled.

"Okay mom. Let her breath." James said as he took his moms shoulder and guided her out of the killing embrace. "Now come on. Let's get you a wedding outfit. You'll be sitting in front of all the rich folk of the land."

"Shouldn't we bring your brother?" She asked. Then her smile faltered "Or you know.... once he's better?"

James wrapped his arm around his mom's shoulder.

"Mom, he'll be okay. He just needs a bit of time to process. And for us to help him when he's ready." He said with a smile. "Besides. I already took him to MY tailor for his wedding outfit. This is all about you."

"What?" She asked. "He already has his?"

"Been in my closet since before the whole desert thing went down." He said. "Now come on. Amina's gonna show you the good stuff when it comes to clothes. And IIIII am gonna grab the ingredients for grandma's chile verde." He said. "Gonna have to B.S. the beans though. Cause I do not recall ever seeing any since I got here." He paused in his tracks as he tried to come to terms with that sudden realization.

He turned to look at Amina.

"Hon. Does Petravus NOT have beans?" He asked, suddenly concerned.

"What are beans?" She asked in return.

Next to her Mrs. Choi's mouth dropped open as she heard the new info about the world she was now in.

\----------

"Are you ready Samantha?" Dr. Munro asked. "We can hold off if you want to."

Samantha nodded, the hood of her jacket bouncing a little as she did. Her hands clenched on the leg of her sweatpants and she could feel the nails there straining at the cloth of her gloves.

"Okay." The doctor said. "Remember; it's just the two of them and a security officer for safety reasons. No cameras or anything."

"You mean in case I hurt anyone?" Samantha asked.

Dr. Munro frowned a bit.

"In case anyone tries to hurt you." She answered. "Or in case anyone tries to get in besides Mr. Morgan or Mr. Laurent. We're still not allowing press or anyone else in yet. This is only happening because I thought it might help you. Even lawyers and government officials are

being stonewalled until you've been brought back into a.... state of stability."

Samantha looked over at the doctor, despite her eyes being concealed by her hood.

"So I'm unstable?" She asked.

Dr. Munro just stared at her emotionally. "Aren't you?" She asked back.

Samantha thought about it for a moment. Then simply turned back.

"I'm glad we were at least able to get you in touch with your father." The doctor said a moment later as she walked over to the wall and prepared to open the blinds there. "And I'm glad he took it so well."

She nodded. "Thank you for that by the way."

"Of course." Dr Munro replied. "Now are you ready?"

Samantha gulped. This would be her first time talking to anyone in person besides the doctor since being brought to the hospital.

She nodded and Dr. Munro pulled the chain that withdrew the curtains.

On the other side of the window were a middle aged black man in a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt, and a scrawny young white guy that she thought might have been in high school, wearing hole-ridden jeans and a shirt that had some kind of scrabbly black band logo on it. In the corner stood a large man in a police-like outfit wearing a vest with HOSPITAL SECURITY on the front doing everything he could to look like he wasn't looking at Samantha.

Samantha Jenkins on the other hand, looked like an professional linebacker wearing their workout sweat gear. She was dressed head to toe in the largest set of black sweatpants and black hoodie that the staff could find. The hood was drawn over her face and cinched tight enough that she could only see a few inches around her new snout. Her hands were bundled into a set of leather gloves that didn't even reach her wrists, and pressed into the hoodie's belly pouch. They hadn't been able to find any shoes that fit the shape of her new feet, so they'd simply put some of the hospital's grippy socks on them instead.

"Woah." Said the young punk. "That's not intimidating at all."

Jenkins winced and withdrew even as the other man elbowed the younger one in the ribs.

"What?" He asked as he rubbed his ribs. "She looks like a freaking werewolf ninja. It's badass."

The older man simply sighed and rolled his eyes. "Good afternoon Ms. Jenkins." He said in his Hispanic accent. "Do you remember us?"

Samantha nodded. "Course I do." She said. "Hard to forget something like that." She pointed at one then the other with her gloved hand. "Wizard." She said as she pointed at him. "Bargain bin Hulk."

"Hey!" The younger man said. "If anything. Being the hulk IN REAL LIFE makes me the better hulk than any actor ever was. Also, real rich coming from a 'BARGAIN BIN' Wonder Woman." He said while making air quotes around the words.

"ANYWAYS." Said the older man. "We wanted to come see how you were doing. And the Doctor here thought that might be a good idea. Shared experience and all. I'm Damarius Laurent. This is-"

"Call me A.P." The punk said. "Real name's too long. Glad to see you up and moving and not wheeled away to some government lab."

She nodded. "Corporal Samantha Jenkins." She replied. "And same. I'm surprised none of us is being dissected after whatever that whole thing was."

A.P. shrugged. "President called it a 'magical experiment' gone wrong." He said. "Oh yeah. He totally admitted that magic is a thing now. So, that's new."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (273/?)

[previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/za0xl9/wait_is_this_just_gate_272/)

Writer's note: Don't worry there's absolutely no foreshadowing in this chapter. None. I promise.

^(Okay. Maaaaaaybe a little.)

Enjoy.

\~

Knock! Knock! Knock!

James and Amina both groaned at the sound of their door being rapped upon repeatedly by whoever was outside of it.

Being the more recovered of the two James slowly rolled out of the bed with a cry of, "Just a minute!" before slipping into the robes that he wore during his downtime.

He looked out the window and saw that the sun was only an hour or so away from setting. The two of them had passed out almost immediately upon getting to their room and getting Amina situated in their bed. And also being cared for by a pair of healers.

James opened the door with a look of annoyance and confusion.

"Kai?" He asked. "Didn't even realize you were here in the castle." His eyes widened as he saw the elf in full for the first time since the desert. And even then he'd been only barely conscious and hadn't SEEN the elf. "What's going on?" He asked.

Kai turned his newly sightless face to face James more directly, the glittering gems of his mask glinting as they caught the sun's last few rays.

"I come to bid you both farewell." He answered. "The sun is setting on my last day here in the castle for the foreseeable future. I must return to my duties. I wanted to make sure that you were both doing well. I was pleasantly surprised to find that you were no longer in the Healing Ward."

"Based on appearances I'm surprised you weren't in one of the beds beside us." James countered. Then he remembered his manners and gestured for the Deep Dark Guardian to enter. "Please, come in."

Kai held up a hand and James watched as a pair of what looked like black widows retreated up his arm.

"I'm afraid there's not much time." He said as he gestured to the windows behind James. James remembered the elf's warning about not being able to stay out at night. "Besides I simply came to say goodbye and see to your well being. And to thank you."

James's head cocked. "Thank us?" He asked.

Kai nodded. "Indeed. You helped me find justice for the dwarves." HE took a deep breath and absently scratched at the edge of the mask. "And a bit of.... well... vengeance for the injuries I gained while helping you."

James furrowed his eyebrows.

"Last time I checked you patched my ass back together from a jigsaw puzzle." James countered. "Twice actually." He pointed a thumb over his shoulder. "And I'm guessing you helped Amina too."

Kai nodded. "She's a good match for you." He said. "She was nearly as badly injured as you were." He shrugged a bit. "Though, with significantly less internal bleeding for my spiders to-"

James cut him off with a shake of his head and a hand in the air.

"Don't.... don't mention that." James said. "Please and thank you."

Kai simply smiled. Then his face turned more serious.

"Has the King told you?" He asked.

"About?" James shot back.

Kai nodded grimly. "The armored man that stood beside their... Major." He began, and James looked at him curiously. "How he wasn't recovered after the battle despite my having subdued him. How he disappeared?"

"He did?" James asked with concern. "How?"

Kai looked around, despite no longer needing to, as if making sure nobody was around to see or hear them.

"The Agency interfered." He said softly. "They stole him right from under us while we were too busy fighting."

James felt his hairs stand on edge, and felt the fur on his left arm puff up. He also looked around, and glanced back at Amina who was staring at the door from the bed.

"King Farrick informed me of how you have clashed with them in the past." Kai added. "I thought you should know about this. Especially since the armored man is one of your world's people."

James gulped as he nodded. "Yeah. That's.... that's good to know." He replied. "I'll have to keep an eye out." He winced. "Sorry."

Kai simply chuckled once. Then held out a hand. James took the hand and shook.

"We are...." Kai began before pausing to think. "Well met. James Choi of Earth. Even if it was under ill circumstances." He said.

"Yeah man." James said. "Thank you. For... everything really. Especially the whole not-letting-me-die thing."

Kai nodded. "If you ever find yourself in the dark around Petravius. Know that you are watched and in good hands James. Though I stand by what I said about healing you anymore." He said as he turned around and began to walk away. "Until we meet again."

"Same if you ever end up needing my help." James said to the departing elf. "And also we'll see each other again in three weeks."

Kai turned around to peer at him curiously.

"When Amina and I get married. You're sitting front row with the guests of honor." James continued. "We'll make sure to cut the cake before sundown. Open bar."

Kai smiled.

"I like.... smeplie.... spice cake." Kai said hesitantly. "They're hard to get in the deep."

James smiled back. "We'll make sure to have a layer of it."

Then the two turned back and parted ways.

They can put smeplies in cake? James wondered as he closed the door. *But what about the sourness? The salt?*

\----------

Scout Sub-Commander Kor'Os The Unseen approached the area slowly and carefully. She hadn't earned his name by being loud and easily spotted

after all. Even her tusks had been carefully stained with charcoal over the years to make them harder to spot at night.

The report given by the one armed elf had, thus far anyways, matched up with everything she'd seen.

She'd passed the horse, which had sadly perished and was being picked apart by carrion birds. She'd been happy to see that its face had made it to the grains the old elf had laid out for it. It wasn't much, but knowing the unfortunate beast had at least had a final meal had been a comfort if nothing else.

Then she'd come to the small creek that he knew from experience had originated from the lake the elf had spoken of. She'd smelled it's salty, rotten stench miles before he'd actually laid eyes upon the dried up husk of a thing. And as she'd approached it he'd seen countless birds flocking about as they had their pick of the fish that lay dead within the creek bed.

She also spotted the signs and tracks of a handful of travelers that had passed this way, and likely in the same direction he was heading. They'd clearly stopped to wonder at the small creek's dryness and death toll before crossing at the usual spot. She did the same, and hoped that whatever the elf had ACTUALLY seen didn't get these people too.

She hadn't had to worry about that it turned out.

On the sixth and, at least according to the elf's rambling, last day of the trip she found the group that had stopped at the creek.

There were only four of them. Three adults, two of whom appeared to be a couple and one other adult, either a friend or potentially an employee of some kind, and a child.

Kor'Os didn't bother approaching them stealthily. For starters she had no reason to suspect them of hostility.

But she also doubted they would have noticed her even if she'd been walking around covered in bells and whistles.

She found them standing at the edge of a small ledge that she knew from previous trips overlooked the lake in question. They stood staring out at the FORMER body of water with wide eyes and mouths agape. And as she stepped up next to them her expression matched.

The man who wasn't part of the couple glanced at her absently for a moment as they realized she was there. She noticed him glance down at the badge on her chest that was her only visible marker as a member of the Petravian Army. Then he went back to staring out at the "lake".

"Fuckin' hells." She said in amazement.

"Yeah." The man said quietly.

She looked around at the sludgy, stinking, mix of mud, silt, lake weed, fish, and whatever else was down there. She noticed what looked like slashes in some areas, as if some massive blade had torn up the ground beneath the lake, forming massive trenches seemingly at random. But the edges were too clean, and the mud around them hadn't been raised or crushed or anything to mark something passing through and disturbing it.

She thought of what the elf had described, how the end of his arm had looked with its odd, non-bleeding, open end.

She left the small party there. Telling them to turn back and head the way they'd come, Royal orders.

She had no such orders. But most people simply took that kind of thing at face value when said by a soldier of the army. Especially when those people were in the same kind of shock she was in now.

They'd probably turn back. Or at least she hoped they did.

She let out a shrill whistle that warbled for a moment. A few seconds later her crow Green-Eye, named for his eyes, landed on her shoulder. She whispered in Green-Eye's ear for a moment. Once she was done the crow tapped its beak against her head and she held up a scrap of jerky for it, which it gobbled greedily.

"Go tell the Commander and hurry back." She said. Green-Eye cawed, then took to the air.

Then she continued on toward the arboreal village that she already knew was as gone as the lake it had been next to. She'd already seen the empty space it was supposed to be in from the small ledge with the travelers. Seen, despite still lingering disbelief, all the trees that simply WEREN'T there any more.

But she needed to see the extent of whatever was happening.

After all. She thought as the dread in the pit of her stomach grew. *Not much of a scout if I don't get eyes on the exact thing I was told to report on.*

She made a point of ignoring how a large portion of the trees she passed seemed to be missing their upper sections. Especially since she saw no signs of the discarded treetops anywhere on the forest floor.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/zdoscm/wait_is_this_just_gate_274/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (272/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z91apa/wait_is_this_just_gate_271/)

Writer's note: Am I redeeming him? No. No I'm not. (At least not right now. IDK about later.)

But also, not every bad guy is straight 100% bad guy. AND YES.... I do mean that. Do with that info as you will.

Enjoy.

\~

James was almost glad that his mother had left the healing ward when he and the King arrived.

He didn't have any issue with her being there. But he knew she needed rest. And he also wanted to have this discussion without her for now. He wanted the marriage to have at least some surprises for her. After all, she'd been bugging him about getting married almost since he'd moved out of the house all those years ago now.

When the King had left, happy to see both of them doing better and excited to focus on something other than political disasters, James struggled his way to his feet again so he could ask the healers something.

A few minutes later he was wheeling Amina down the halls in a wheelchair, using it as a walking aid as he did.

Both of them wore ear to ear smiles as they did.

\----------

"So. Let met get this straight." Driscoll said as he looked down at the people in the dark room.

He had a feeling that the darkness in the room, and the odd shimmering in front of their faces was supposed to keep him from seeing them. But they apparently didn't know much about the tech his suit had built in. He could see each of their faces clearly.

"You want me to join you as a sort of.... advisor slash spy. You'll release me. Give me a new arm. Though I doubt it'll be up to spec. And you'll even see if you can teach me magic in my mechanical body. Though, you're doubtful on that front."

"Correct." Said the large, goat horned man in the back right seat of the room.

"And all you need me to do is eliminate Captain Choi, Princess Amina, and if possible the King? After that I can either keep working with you guys or fuck off to wherever I want?" He asked.

"In-eloquently put. But essentially. Yes." Said a tall slim woman that he couldn't tell the species of. She looked like an elf with gills.

"And what exactly do I get from joining you guys? You know. Assuming I do." He asked.

"Well." Said the group of people that harmonized together. "For starters you'll be one of the few people who will survive the destruction of this world by the entity they are calling the 'cleanser' when it inevitably defeats them."

"If it defeating them is inevitable, then why do you guys need anyone dead?" He countered. "Leave em here and let this CLEANSER do the work for you. Or just do your escape plan and leave. Either way they stop being your issue."

The people in the room looked at each other and Driscoll got the idea that they were having a conversation without actually saying anything. Or at least nothing his suit could pick up.

"We have plans in motion." Said the large goat man. "As well as contracts that we intend to honor before this world ends. We may be an organization of.... ill means. But we still have a code."

Driscoll sat motionless and silent for several seconds. He tilted his helmet a bit as he did, giving the impression of being deep in thought.

Actually he was watching footage of his old teammates. He also quickly skimmed some footage of Choi and Vickers and read some of their reports.

He hated them. These two traitors who'd gone native and turned on their own people. These two fighters who'd killed his entire team, almost by themselves. Hell, Vickers had literally dismantled Five with his own hands.

He wanted them dead. And he wanted the Princess dead too. The King? Well. He didn't really give a damn about the King one way or the other.

But at the end of the day, emotions or not, the math was simple.

The Agency wasn't the U.S.A.

And while he may have hated the traitors and the princess. He at least UNDERSTOOD their motives. He understood WHY they had approached the FOB in force and been ready for a fight. Especially with Choi and the SEAL advising them.

He pulled up one of the few images he had actually SAVED to his suits heavily encrypted memory.

A single picture of his old OLD squad back when he'd first put the suit on. Back before Five or any of the others besides Doc.

Doc was standing right next to him. Along with The Goat, who'd been dead for six years now. The original Doc, who was leading his own recovery squad back on Earth now. Nickel, who'd fallen to the very blood toxicity that had been her namesake only a year after that picture had been taken. And lastly Benny. Easily the most important person in that picture to Driscoll.

He.... didn't like to think about what had happened to Benny.

The six of them stood on top of a deep sea desalinization plant holding a New China Party flag that had been half burned away by the op they'd just run. And American flag had replaced it on the massive plexiglass structure behind them.

He stared at the flag as he thought.

"Deal." He said.

The people in the room murmured as they began smirking and grinning.

"Shake on it?" He asked. "Also, is there any paperwork we need to fill out? If so I want the new arm first."

"There are certain rituals to partake." The harmonizing group said as they and the goat person approached.

Driscoll struggled a bit as he attempted to extend his remaining hand for the gesture.

The.... hive mind.... or whatever they were, waved a hand as their eyes flared with red light, and he felt his arm being released. He extended it and the man with the goat horns shook it once. Then he extended it to the one that had released him.

His eyes lingered over the small button on his interface.

Get closer. He said.

He shook the lead person's hand and only a moment later felt his legs release too. He began walking over to where the other people were sitting and made like he was going to greet them too.

Something nagged at the back of his mind. Something he'd forgotten. It was like an itch that he couldn't quite reach.

He got near one of the tables and a large man with a scar running from his forehead down the side of his head and even down his neck stood up to shake as well. A small woman barely three feet tall stood up on her chair and tried to join.

Driscoll looked at the small button on the interface and winked at it.

The window appeared that was designed to make sure the option wasn't chosen accidentally and he clicked on the "Confirm" button.

He smiled as he knew that his suit was sending every ounce of information it had out in the strongest communication burst it could muster with energy cells that wouldn't be necessary in a moment. He waited for the heat of the thermite charges to go off before they set off the rest of the charges stored in his back.

He shook the small woman's hand right as he expected it all to go off.

Then nothing did.

He looked back, as if he might be able to see the problem with whatever was going wrong with his pack.

"Something the matter Mister Driscoll?" The harmonic people asked. "Expecting something to happen?"

He clicked on the "DET. ALL" button on his screen again. Then the confirmation button.

Still nothing happened.

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Another brief bit of laughter as he smiles and nods.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (272/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z918td/wait_is_this_just_gate_271/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Am I redeeming him? No. No I'm not. (At least not right now. IDK about later.)

But also, not every bad guy is straight 100% bad guy. AND YES.... I do mean that. Do with that info as you will.

Enjoy.

\~

James was almost glad that his mother had left the healing ward when he and the King arrived.

He didn't have any issue with her being there. But he knew she needed rest. And he also wanted to have this discussion without her for now. He wanted the marriage to have at least some surprises for her. After all, she'd been bugging him about getting married almost since he'd moved out of the house all those years ago now.

When the King had left, happy to see both of them doing better and excited to focus on something other than political disasters, James struggled his way to his feet again so he could ask the healers something.

A few minutes later he was wheeling Amina down the halls in a wheelchair, using it as a walking aid as he did.

Both of them wore ear to ear smiles as they did.

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"So. Let met get this straight." Driscoll said as he looked down at the people in the dark room.

He had a feeling that the darkness in the room, and the odd shimmering in front of their faces was supposed to keep him from seeing them. But they apparently didn't know much about the tech his suit had built in. He could see each of their faces clearly.

"You want me to join you as a sort of.... advisor slash spy. You'll release me. Give me a new arm. Though I doubt it'll be up to spec. And you'll even see if you can teach me magic in my mechanical body. Though, you're doubtful on that front."

"Correct." Said the large, goat horned man in the back right seat of the room.

"And all you need me to do is eliminate Captain Choi, Princess Amina, and if possible the King? After that I can either keep working with you guys or fuck off to wherever I want?" He asked.

"In-eloquently put. But essentially. Yes." Said a tall slim woman that he couldn't tell the species of. She looked like an elf with gills.

"And what exactly do I get from joining you guys? You know. Assuming I do." He asked.

"Well." Said the group of people that harmonized together. "For starters you'll be one of the few people who will survive the destruction of this world by the entity they are calling the 'cleanser' when it inevitably defeats them."

"If it defeating them is inevitable, then why do you guys need anyone dead?" He countered. "Leave em here and let this CLEANSER do the work for you. Or just do your escape plan and leave. Either way they stop being your issue."

The people in the room looked at each other and Driscoll got the idea that they were having a conversation without actually saying anything. Or at least nothing his suit could pick up.

"We have plans in motion." Said the large goat man. "As well as contracts that we intend to honor before this world ends. We may be an organization of.... ill means. But we still have a code."

Driscoll sat motionless and silent for several seconds. He tilted his helmet a bit as he did, giving the impression of being deep in thought.

Actually he was watching footage of his old teammates. He also quickly skimmed some footage of Choi and Vickers and read some of their reports.

He hated them. These two traitors who'd gone native and turned on their own people. These two fighters who'd killed his entire team, almost by themselves. Hell, Vickers had literally dismantled Five with his own hands.

He wanted them dead. And he wanted the Princess dead too. The King? Well. He didn't really give a damn about the King one way or the other.

But at the end of the day, emotions or not, the math was simple.

The Agency wasn't the U.S.A.

And while he may have hated the traitors and the princess. He at least UNDERSTOOD their motives. He understood WHY they had approached the FOB in force and been ready for a fight. Especially with Choi and the SEAL advising them.

He pulled up one of the few images he had actually SAVED to his suits heavily encrypted memory.

A single picture of his old OLD squad back when he'd first put the suit on. Back before Five or any of the others besides Doc.

Doc was standing right next to him. Along with The Goat, who'd been dead for six years now. The original Doc, who was leading his own recovery squad back on Earth now. Nickel, who'd fallen to the very blood toxicity that had been her namesake only a year after that picture had been taken. And lastly Benny. Easily the most important person in that picture to Driscoll.

He.... didn't like to think about what had happened to Benny.

The six of them stood on top of a deep sea desalinization plant holding a New China Party flag that had been half burned away by the op they'd just

run. And American flag had replaced it on the massive plexiglass structure behind them.

He stared at the flag as he thought.

"Deal." He said.

The people in the room murmured as they began smirking and grinning.

"Shake on it?" He asked. "Also, is there any paperwork we need to fill out? If so I want the new arm first."

"There are certain rituals to partake." The harmonizing group said as they and the goat person approached.

Driscoll struggled a bit as he attempted to extend his remaining hand for the gesture.

The.... hive mind.... or whatever they were, waved a hand as their eyes flared with red light, and he felt his arm being released. He extended it and the man with the goat horns shook it once. Then he extended it to the one that had released him.

His eyes lingered over the small button on his interface.

Get closer. He said.

He shook the lead person's hand and only a moment later felt his legs release too. He began walking over to where the other people were sitting and made like he was going to greet them too.

Something nagged at the back of his mind. Something he'd forgotten. It was like an itch that he couldn't quite reach.

He got near one of the tables and a large man with a scar running from his forehead down the side of his head and even down his neck stood up to shake as well. A small woman barely three feet tall stood up on her chair and tried to join.

Driscoll looked at the small button on the interface and winked at it.

The window appeared that was designed to make sure the option wasn't chosen accidentally and he clicked on the "Confirm" button.

He smiled as he knew that his suit was sending every ounce of information it had out in the strongest communication burst it could muster with energy cells that wouldn't be necessary in a moment. He waited for the heat of the thermite charges to go off before they set off the rest of the charges stored in his back.

He shook the small woman's hand right as he expected it all to go off.

Then nothing did.

He looked back, as if he might be able to see the problem with whatever was going wrong with his pack.

"Something the matter Mister Driscoll?" The harmonic people asked. "Expecting something to happen?"

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z84gmc/wait_is_this_just_gate_270/)

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He paused and took a seated position on the edge of a plinth for a statue of some kind of dragon-man thing as he watched them pass by. The civilians looked at him warily, stealing glances from time to time, or nodding their head in passive greeting as they walked, their shackles clanking at ankle and wrist.

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But the First Sergeant stopped for a moment as neared James's position. He didn't avoid James's gaze, nor did he show any aggression toward him. Instead he looked almost sorrowful as the guards ushered him on.

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"Not First Sergeant anymore I don't think." Nguyen said as he turned around and awkwardly walked backwards. "And you really don't remember me zero three nine?" He asked as he walked through the door to the next hall and out of sight.

James stood up in surprise, not entirely oblivious to the pain this caused him.

"Senior Drill Sergeant?" He asked.

"Captain Choi?" A familiar voice asked from behind him. James glanced back and saw the King walking down the hall from where all the prisoners had come from. But he almost immediately turned back to look at the door still echoed with the slowly fading sounds of chained feet and arms.

"Your majesty." He greeted back quietly.

"What are you doing out here lad?" The King asked curiously as he got near. "Should be in bed healing."

James looked back at him as he settled the crutch back under his arm.

"Yeah. Just uh...." He glanced back at the door. "Just had to check in on my brother. He's uh.... He's struggling with what happened a bit." He said as he recommenced his slow walk.

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"Yeah." James replied. "But lets talk about that once I'm off of these probably still broken legs."

King Farrick simply nodded and continued guiding James forward.

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"Corporal Jenkins?" A soft voice asked.

Jenkins slowly swam back into consciousness. "Hmm?"

"Corporal Jenkins are you awake?"

"Mmmmm.... yeah?" She said uncertainly. "Whe....where am I?"

"You're in a hospital." The soft voice answered. "I'm doctor Janessa Munro. I've been asked to speak to you."

"Hospital?" She wondered. "Cause I was hurt."

"That was part of it. Yes." Doctor Munro replied. "But also because of the change you underwent. Multiple... changes really. But one more-so than the other."

"Changes?" Her face scrunched up as that reminded her of something. Wait. Why couldn't she see? "I.... I changed." She said. "I became... I am... a monster." She said. She could feel tears streaming down her face. A face that was too long now. And the tears didn't fall on open skin. But on fur. "Why can't I see?" She asked. Her mind was clearing rapidly. "Why can't I move?" She asked as she struggled against some kind of firmly pressed blanket.

"We've restrained you for now. We don't want you accidentally hurting anyone. Yourself included." The doctor answered. "As for your eyes, I can uncover them. But I need you to remain calm if I do. Okay?"

Jenkins felt herself beginning to hyperventilate. But her breaths were deeper than they had been before.... before she'd been changed. They rumbled with each deep inhale, and hissed out of her nostrils with each exhale.

"Not okay." She said between breaths. "Not okay. I'm not supposed to be like this." She struggled a bit more. "I'm a person. Not supposed to be a monster."

Suddenly she felt a small, soft, hand gently rest on her forearm.

"Samantha." The doctor said just as gently. "You're right. You're not supposed to be like this."

The sudden agreement from the doctor made her stop her struggling for a moment as she felt the hand rest there. She turned her head to look at where the hand was despite not being able to see it.

"We're going to try to get you back the way you were by any means necessary Corporal. We really are. But until then we need you to be able to cooperate with us. And part of that is coming to terms with what has happened." The doctor said softly. "I know it's difficult. And likely terrifying. But we're here to help okay?"

Jenkins gulped as she tried to get her breathing back under control. She nodded once, quickly.

"Okay." Doctor Munro said. "I'm going to take the blindfold off. There's a mirror above you. I need you to look at it for as long as you can. But I can take the mirror away, or cover your eyes again if you want. Just let me know. Alright?"

She nodded again. "Just not the blindfold. Don't make me blind again. Please."

"Okay." The doctor said as she took her hand from Jenkins' arm. "I'm taking the blindfold off now. Try to stay calm.

Jenkins felt the doctor's hands moving at the back of her head. A moment later the cloth over her eyes loosened and pulled away. She winced at the sudden light.

When they opened the sight in front of her caused her to begin hyperventilating again.

Her eyes locked on the bright orange, slightly reflective, eyes in the massive mirror in front of her. The eyes surrounded by dark brown, almost black fur. That sat just above a fanged snout and just below a set of pointed, slightly tufted ears that rotated to and fro seemingly at random.

She locked eyes with the mirror image of herself and felt a primal, instinctive, need to maintain that eye contact until the other her backed down. Even as she felt dread, disgust, and anger at the fact that that WASN'T supposed to be her.

She strained at the blue plastic wrapped blanket restraint that covered the rest of her body and kept her pressed to the medical bed. But it was unyielding.

"Corporal Jenkins?" The Doctor asked from where she was standing next to the bed. "Samantha?"

"Take it away." She hissed through her bared fangs. The bared fangs that made her subconsciously puff her fur up in the mirror. "Take it away!" She yelled. "TAKE IT AWAY!"

The doctors hands reached up and spun the mirror around on its gimbal. Despite the logical part of her mind knowing better, she became relieved and just a little bit proud of the fact that the OTHER wolf had backed down first.

She felt tension release from her joints and muscles as she slowly sank back down. She hadn't even realized that she'd arched up toward the mirror.

Her breathing slowed as she began to look around.

She'd expected to see a series of tools and equipment. Needles and saws and scalpels and things that might be used to dissect her and analyze her new form.

Instead she simply saw an vitals machine, with a few lines leading under her restraint blanket, and a crash cart. Other than that the room was sparse, with a few chairs and a surveillance camera up in the corner of the ceiling.

She looked at the Doctor and saw a small, grey haired, woman of middle eastern complexion.

She had a kind face that bore a sad expression as she looked at Jenkins.

"Are you okay?" Doctor Munro asked.

Jenkins looked up at the back of the mirror. Her breathing quickened a little bit and she felt more tears forming on her eyes.

"No." She said softly. "What's happened to me?"

Suddenly she felt that small hand on her arm again. She looked down at the doctor, who was wearing a pained smile.

"That's part of what we're trying to figure out ." The doctor said. "And I'm here to help you through the process of learning about it. We're

going to try to cure you and make you.... well... you... again. But in the meantime we need to learn what we can about this. And until we discover a cure I'm going to help you come to terms with your new body. Will you let me do that?"

Jenkins looked down at her with teary eyes.

"You'll cure me?" She asked.

Doctor Munro shook her head, causing a bit of panic to form in her mind.

"Not me personally no. I'm just a psychiatrist. But the doctors here will do everything they can. Yes." She said with a smile.

She looked around again. Then she nodded.

"Please help me." She said as she began to cry in earnest. "I don't want to be this."

The doctor pressed a tissue to her eyes, where it had come from she didn't know, and wiped the tears away.

"I will." Doctor Munro said as she balled up the tissue and tossed it away.

"And please wear less perfume next time." Jenkins added with a sniffle. "My nose is really strong now."

Doctor Munro chuckled. "Sorry." She said. "I'll keep that in mind. Now, besides a cure for.... I don't know what they're officially calling this yet... Do you need anything?"

Jenkins looked at her.

"Can I call my Dad?" She asked. "He's probably worried about me."

Doctor Munro smiled again. "That shouldn't be too hard to arrange."

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"Mmmmm.... yeah?" She said uncertainly. "Whe....where am I?"

"You're in a hospital." The soft voice answered. "I'm doctor Janessa Munro. I've been asked to speak to you."

"Hospital?" She wondered. "Cause I was hurt."

"That was part of it. Yes." Doctor Munro replied. "But also because of the change you underwent. Multiple... changes really. But one more-so than the other."

"Changes?" Her face scrunched up as that reminded her of something. Wait. Why couldn't she see? "I.... I changed." She said. "I became... I am... a monster." She said. She could feel tears streaming down her face. A face that was too long now. And the tears didn't fall on open skin. But on fur. "Why can't I see?" She asked. Her mind was clearing rapidly. "Why can't I move?" She asked as she struggled against some kind of firmly pressed blanket.

"We've restrained you for now. We don't want you accidentally hurting anyone. Yourself included." The doctor answered. "As for your eyes, I can uncover them. But I need you to remain calm if I do. Okay?"

Jenkins felt herself beginning to hyperventilate. But her breaths were deeper than they had been before.... before she'd been changed. They rumbled with each deep inhale, and hissed out of her nostrils with each exhale.

"Not okay." She said between breaths. "Not okay. I'm not supposed to be like this." She struggled a bit more. "I'm a person. Not supposed to be a monster."

Suddenly she felt a small, soft, hand gently rest on her forearm.

"Samantha." The doctor said just as gently. "You're right. You're not supposed to be like this."

The sudden agreement from the doctor made her stop her struggling for a moment as she felt the hand rest there. She turned her head to look at where the hand was despite not being able to see it.

"We're going to try to get you back the way you were by any means necessary Corporal. We really are. But until then we need you to be able to cooperate with us. And part of that is coming to terms with what has happened." The doctor said softly. "I know it's difficult. And likely terrifying. But we're here to help okay?"

Jenkins gulped as she tried to get her breathing back under control. She nodded once, quickly.

"Okay." Doctor Munro said. "I'm going to take the blindfold off. There's a mirror above you. I need you to look at it for as long as you can. But I can take the mirror away, or cover your eyes again if you want. Just let me know. Alright?"

She nodded again. "Just not the blindfold. Don't make me blind again. Please."

"Okay." The doctor said as she took her hand from Jenkins' arm. "I'm taking the blindfold off now. Try to stay calm.

Jenkins felt the doctor's hands moving at the back of her head. A moment later the cloth over her eyes loosened and pulled away. She winced at the sudden light.

When they opened the sight in front of her caused her to begin hyperventilating again.

Her eyes locked on the bright orange, slightly reflective, eyes in the massive mirror in front of her. The eyes surrounded by dark brown, almost black fur. That sat just above a fanged snout and just below a set of pointed, slightly tufted ears that rotated to and fro seemingly at random.

She locked eyes with the mirror image of herself and felt a primal, instinctive, need to maintain that eye contact until the other her backed down. Even as she felt dread, disgust, and anger at the fact that that WASN'T supposed to be her.

She strained at the blue plastic wrapped blanket restraint that covered the rest of her body and kept her pressed to the medical bed. But it was unyielding.

"Corporal Jenkins?" The Doctor asked from where she was standing next to the bed. "Samantha?"

"Take it away." She hissed through her bared fangs. The bared fangs that made her subconsciously puff her fur up in the mirror. "Take it away!" She yelled. "TAKE IT AWAY!"

The doctors hands reached up and spun the mirror around on its gimbal. Despite the logical part of her mind knowing better, she became relieved and just a little bit proud of the fact that the OTHER wolf had backed down first.

She felt tension release from her joints and muscles as she slowly sank back down. She hadn't even realized that she'd arched up toward the mirror.

Her breathing slowed as she began to look around.

She'd expected to see a series of tools and equipment. Needles and saws and scalpels and things that might be used to dissect her and analyze her new form.

Instead she simply saw an vitals machine, with a few lines leading under her restraint blanket, and a crash cart. Other than that the room was sparse, with a few chairs and a surveillance camera up in the corner of the ceiling.

She looked at the Doctor and saw a small, grey haired, woman of middle eastern complexion.

She had a kind face that bore a sad expression as she looked at Jenkins.

"Are you okay?" Doctor Munro asked.

Jenkins looked up at the back of the mirror. Her breathing quickened a little bit and she felt more tears forming on her eyes.

"No." She said softly. "What's happened to me?"

Suddenly she felt that small hand on her arm again. She looked down at the doctor, who was wearing a pained smile.

"That's part of what we're trying to figure out ." The doctor said. "And I'm here to help you through the process of learning about it. We're going to try to cure you and make you.... well... you... again. But in the meantime we need to learn what we can about this. And until we discover a cure I'm going to help you come to terms with your new body. Will you let me do that?"

Jenkins looked down at her with teary eyes.

"You'll cure me?" She asked.

Doctor Munro shook her head, causing a bit of panic to form in her mind.

"Not me personally no. I'm just a psychiatrist. But the doctors here will do everything they can. Yes." She said with a smile.

She looked around again. Then she nodded.

"Please help me." She said as she began to cry in earnest. "I don't want to be this."

The doctor pressed a tissue to her eyes, where it had come from she didn't know, and wiped the tears away.

"I will." Doctor Munro said as she balled up the tissue and tossed it away.

"And please wear less perfume next time." Jenkins added with a sniffle. "My nose is really strong now."

Doctor Munro chuckled. "Sorry." She said. "I'll keep that in mind. Now, besides a cure for.... I don't know what they're officially calling this yet... Do you need anything?"

Jenkins looked at her.

"Can I call my Dad?" She asked. "He's probably worried about me."

Doctor Munro smiled again. "That shouldn't be too hard to arrange."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/za0sz0/wait_is_this_just_gate_272/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z7cl1n/wait_is_this_just_gate_269/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (269/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z4u9za/wait_is_this_just_gate_268/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (268/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z336vo/wait_is_this_just_gate_267/)

Writer's note: Basically wrapping up this arc at this point. Next up is wedding bells and shattered cliches. Enjoy your leftovers and your weekend everyone.

\~

"Hey fool. Wake up." Said a familiar voice as James felt his foot being shaken.

As he slowly swam back into consciousness James saw the familiar face of his old friend Batista sitting near the foot of his bed.

"Batty?" He asked in a daze. "What are you doing here?"

"Regeneration therapy followed by good old fashioned physical therapy." He said with a grimace. "Plus it's finally cleared out a bit in here so I didn't feel like the wheels were getting in the way." He added as he popped his wooden wheelchair into a wheelie.

James stretched as he attempted to yawn, but was halted by the overwhelming soreness of most of his body.

"Oh god." He said as he instinctively curled up, which simply led to different parts of his body hurting. "How long has it been?"

"You've been out for two days homie." Batty said as he teetered on the wooden wheels of the chair. "They told me your mom, big Joe, and his teacher lady left this morning."

"Joey's cleared?" James asked. "Is he okay?"

Batty shrugged. "Don't know man." He admitted. "I heard what happened though. Hope the little dude's doin' alright. I was gonna see if I could track em down after this."

"Be awesome if you could give me an update once you do." James said as he held up his wolf-hand for a fist-bump. It was one of the few parts of him that didn't hurt. "How is your stomach doing?"

Batty let himself fall back forward. Then, with great effort and a grunt of exertion, lifted himself to his feet. He braced himself for a moment as he wobbled momentarily before lifting his shirt, showing the circular scars of the shotgun round that had hit him, and the surgical scars that had come from removing them from his abdomen before he could be fully healed. His stomach muscles flexed and spasmed as they fought to keep him upright.

After a few moments he flopped back down into the chair with a gasping exhale.

"Still all out of wack." He said as he caught his breath. "But way better than those first few days I'd woken up. Never realized just how vital abs were to doing..... well, just about everything really. And it doesn't help that my back muscles got jacked too." He smiled again. "Also, forcibly regenerating scarred and damaged muscles hurts like fuck dude." He tilted his head as he put on a sad expression. "Plus I can't drink as much because I'm missing a good chunk of my liver. How messed up is that?"

"They didn't regenerate your liver?" James asked. "Seems like that'd be important."

Batty nodded. "Right?" He asked with a chuckle. "Instead they focused on my intestines and spine, as if a Mexican NCO needs those more than a fully functioning liver." He joked.

James laughed despite how much it made the still healing hole in his chest ache. He looked over at the bed next to his and saw Amina there, still slumbering in her mummy's wraps of healing bandages.

"What'd they say about her?" He asked.

Batty shrugged.

"Rough. But gonna live." He replied. "Wouldn't tell me much beside that. Guess doctors here have doctor patient confidentiality too. And she's a royal. But they did say she'd be okay."

James nodded. "That's good." He said as he laid back again. "That all sounds good."

The two of them sat in companionable silence, James was glad to see his old friend up and moving again, even if it was with great difficulty.

"You really fight our people dude?" Batty asked hesitantly after a while. "Like.... U.S. Military personnel?"

James looked at him with a concerned expression, then looked back up at the ceiling as he thought.

"Yeah." He answered after a moment. "Didn't want to. Tried to do it the easy way and just talk things through. But.... they didn't go for it." He reached up and touched a spot on his face where Kai had previously patched him back together, but he couldn't feel the scar there anymore. "And that was even AFTER they'd already tried to kill me once." He added.

Batty watched him curiously for a moment.

"Shit." He said finally. "That means we got mad problems coming doesn't it?"

James nodded slowly. "Yep." He answered. "Yep. Lots of problems."

Batty raised his fist up again. "Well. Guess it's a good thing that I'm not actually in the military anymore huh?" James bumped the fist again. "I gotchu dog." He said as he spun his wheelchair around. "Soon as I'm up and moving again. I gotchu."

James smiled. "Thanks man." He nodded a bit more. "That is actually really reassuring to hear."

Batty slapped his leg lightly, causing James to wince just a little bit. "I gotta get to my therapy. I'll come let you know what I find out about your lil bro later." He said as he wheeled out of the open door.

"Thanks dude!" James called out to him. "Don't flirt with the nurses too hard!"

"Too late!" Batty yelled back as James heard the wooden rolling noises recede down the hallway outside.

Then James heard a rustling noise and realized that Amina was waking up. He smiled, glad to see her moving again.

\----------

Vickers watched silently and with a practiced neutral expression on his face from the small observation room in the Ambassadorial wing of the castle.

It was cliche how similar the setup was to all the interrogation rooms from movies back home. But he'd been subjected to similar questioning when he'd first blown his cover, so he knew the drill.

The fact that the room he was in now actually told the Petravians when the person being interrogated LIED was a revelation though. And the fact that they had werewolves do the questioning because their enhanced hearing allowed for feedback from the people in the room with him, via a series of clickers, was honestly kind of impressive to him.

"So you had no knowledge of your leader's intention to initiate a battle?" The wolf on the other side asked.

"Only that I knew that she was an overly Hooah asshole." First Sergeant Nguyen replied. "And probably a fucking psychotic. But I'm not a shrink."

The wall around the observation window flashed a soft green color and the Petravian observer hit the lower tone clicker. The werewolf interrogator's ear turned that way briefly, then they continued.

"And you and your so called, 'original team members' were only there for observational and research purposes?"

Nguyen hung his head a bit. Vickers could read the discomfort on the mans face. Getting interrogated was worst case scenario for any service member. Much less doing so under these conditions.

"Observation. Information gathering. Research. And to give our people a safe, empty, space to conduct experiments to help us figure out a way home." Nguyen admitted. "We were never sent here to start a fight. Most of the people I came with actually weren't even military. Two thirds of them were civilian scientists."

The wall flashed green with a short flash of red after. The observer clicked one tone, then the other very quickly.

"And that's all?" The wolf asked. "Nothing else?"

Nguyen sighed. "Only an idiot wouldn't expect the brass to use our location as a beachhead." He said. "But by then it was expected that me and my crew would've rotated back."

The wall flashed green again, another clicker tone.

"So the plan was always an invasion?" The wolf asked.

Nguyen let out an exasperated groan.

"Man I don't know." He said in frustration. "I'm not a General or a politician or whatever. I saw a chance to explore a new world with a bunch of magic and stuff. And supposedly one of my old recruits was some kinda super hero there. I figured it would be one last, admittedly weird, deployment before I retired. And if it turned out to be what they said it was in the briefing, then I might get to bring back a cool as souvenir. Excalibur two point oh, or a flying carpet, or something. Plus the pay for while we're over here is MASSIVE."

Vickers nodded as the wall flashed green again and the observer hit the clicker. It was basically the same as his story for coming here.

"Are there any more of your people in this world?" The wolf asked. "Besides the people already accounted for here in the castle?"

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"I'm sorry Ms. Jenkins." The man said. "I'm afraid it's all too real. We're going to help you out. But first you've gotta tell us what you remember."

"No. You're lying. This can't be real." She said as she continued struggling. One of the restraints on her leg began to tear. "Things like that don't exist."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (268/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z32uy2/wait_is_this_just_gate_267/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Basically wrapping up this arc at this point. Next up is wedding bells and shattered cliches. Enjoy your leftovers and your weekend everyone.

\~

"Hey fool. Wake up." Said a familiar voice as James felt his foot being shaken.

As he slowly swam back into consciousness James saw the familiar face of his old friend Batista sitting near the foot of his bed.

"Batty?" He asked in a daze. "What are you doing here?"

"Regeneration therapy followed by good old fashioned physical therapy." He said with a grimace. "Plus it's finally cleared out a bit in here so I didn't feel like the wheels were getting in the way." He added as he popped his wooden wheelchair into a wheelie.

James stretched as he attempted to yawn, but was halted by the overwhelming soreness of most of his body.

"Oh god." He said as he instinctively curled up, which simply led to different parts of his body hurting. "How long has it been?"

"You've been out for two days homie." Batty said as he teetered on the wooden wheels of the chair. "They told me your mom, big Joe, and his teacher lady left this morning."

"Joey's cleared?" James asked. "Is he okay?"

Batty shrugged. "Don't know man." He admitted. "I heard what happened though. Hope the little dude's doin' alright. I was gonna see if I could track em down after this."

"Be awesome if you could give me an update once you do." James said as he held up his wolf-hand for a fist-bump. It was one of the few parts of him that didn't hurt. "How is your stomach doing?"

Batty let himself fall back forward. Then, with great effort and a grunt of exertion, lifted himself to his feet. He braced himself for a moment as he wobbled momentarily before lifting his shirt, showing the circular scars of the shotgun round that had hit him, and the surgical scars that had come from removing them from his abdomen before he could be fully healed. His stomach muscles flexed and spasmed as they fought to keep him upright.

After a few moments he flopped back down into the chair with a gasping exhale.

"Still all out of wack." He said as he caught his breath. "But way better than those first few days I'd woken up. Never realized just how vital abs were to doing..... well, just about everything really. And it doesn't help that my back muscles got jacked too." He smiled again. "Also, forcibly regenerating scarred and damaged muscles hurts like fuck dude." He tilted his head as he put on a sad expression. "Plus I can't drink as much because I'm missing a good chunk of my liver. How messed up is that?"

"They didn't regenerate your liver?" James asked. "Seems like that'd be important."

Batty nodded. "Right?" He asked with a chuckle. "Instead they focused on my intestines and spine, as if a Mexican NCO needs those more than a fully functioning liver." He joked.

James laughed despite how much it made the still healing hole in his chest ache. He looked over at the bed next to his and saw Amina there, still slumbering in her mummy's wraps of healing bandages.

"What'd they say about her?" He asked.

Batty shrugged.

"Rough. But gonna live." He replied. "Wouldn't tell me much beside that. Guess doctors here have doctor patient confidentiality too. And she's a royal. But they did say she'd be okay."

James nodded. "That's good." He said as he laid back again. "That all sounds good."

The two of them sat in companionable silence, James was glad to see his old friend up and moving again, even if it was with great difficulty.

"You really fight our people dude?" Batty asked hesitantly after a while. "Like.... U.S. Military personnel?"

James looked at him with a concerned expression, then looked back up at the ceiling as he thought.

"Yeah." He answered after a moment. "Didn't want to. Tried to do it the easy way and just talk things through. But.... they didn't go for it." He reached up and touched a spot on his face where Kai had previously patched him back together, but he couldn't feel the scar there anymore. "And that was even AFTER they'd already tried to kill me once." He added.

Batty watched him curiously for a moment.

"Shit." He said finally. "That means we got mad problems coming doesn't it?"

James nodded slowly. "Yep." He answered. "Yep. Lots of problems."

Batty raised his fist up again. "Well. Guess it's a good thing that I'm not actually in the military anymore huh?" James bumped the fist again. "I gotchu dog." He said as he spun his wheelchair around. "Soon as I'm up and moving again. I gotchu."

James smiled. "Thanks man." He nodded a bit more. "That is actually really reassuring to hear."

Batty slapped his leg lightly, causing James to wince just a little bit. "I gotta get to my therapy. I'll come let you know what I find out about your lil bro later." He said as he wheeled out of the open door.

"Thanks dude!" James called out to him. "Don't flirt with the nurses too hard!"

"Too late!" Batty yelled back as James heard the wooden rolling noises recede down the hallway outside.

Then James heard a rustling noise and realized that Amina was waking up. He smiled, glad to see her moving again.

\----------

Vickers watched silently and with a practiced neutral expression on his face from the small observation room in the Ambassadorial wing of the castle.

It was cliche how similar the setup was to all the interrogation rooms from movies back home. But he'd been subjected to similar questioning when he'd first blown his cover, so he knew the drill.

The fact that the room he was in now actually told the Petravians when the person being interrogated LIED was a revelation though. And the fact that they had werewolves do the questioning because their enhanced hearing allowed for feedback from the people in the room with him, via a series of clickers, was honestly kind of impressive to him.

"So you had no knowledge of your leader's intention to initiate a battle?" The wolf on the other side asked.

"Only that I knew that she was an overly Hooah asshole." First Sergeant Nguyen replied. "And probably a fucking psychotic. But I'm not a shrink."

The wall around the observation window flashed a soft green color and the Petravian observer hit the lower tone clicker. The werewolf interrogator's ear turned that way briefly, then they continued.

"And you and your so called, 'original team members' were only there for observational and research purposes?"

Nguyen hung his head a bit. Vickers could read the discomfort on the mans face. Getting interrogated was worst case scenario for any service member. Much less doing so under these conditions.

"Observation. Information gathering. Research. And to give our people a safe, empty, space to conduct experiments to help us figure out a way home." Nguyen admitted. "We were never sent here to start a fight. Most of the people I came with actually weren't even military. Two thirds of them were civilian scientists."

The wall flashed green with a short flash of red after. The observer clicked one tone, then the other very quickly.

"And that's all?" The wolf asked. "Nothing else?"

Nguyen sighed. "Only an idiot wouldn't expect the brass to use our location as a beachhead." He said. "But by then it was expected that me and my crew would've rotated back."

The wall flashed green again, another clicker tone.

"So the plan was always an invasion?" The wolf asked.

Nguyen let out an exasperated groan.

"Man I don't know." He said in frustration. "I'm not a General or a politician or whatever. I saw a chance to explore a new world with a bunch of magic and stuff. And supposedly one of my old recruits was some kinda super hero there. I figured it would be one last, admittedly weird, deployment before I retired. And if it turned out to be what they said it was in the briefing, then I might get to bring back a cool ass souvenir. Excalibur two point oh, or a flying carpet, or something. Plus the pay for while we're over here is MASSIVE."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (267/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z29bnv/wait_is_this_just_gate_266/)

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PARTY ON WAYNE!!!

Enjoy.

\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~\~

"Good evening folks." Says the well dressed man sitting at the table. "I'm Troy Lake." He gestures to the equally well dressed woman seated next to him who smiles and gives a small wave. "This is Amanda Nunez, here live at CNN Ready News."

The camera pans over a bit to focus on just him, with a small pop up next to him showing an image of three silhouetted figures that are made to look like generic super heroes.

"We come to you tonight with the news, which Amanda and I will go over rather quickly after our first commercial break. But first lets address the uh... WOLF... in the room." He says with a coy smirk at the lazy joke. "Last night at approximately six thirty in the evening, outside the town of Sturgis, South Dakota -typically known for its yearly motorcycle festival- something entirely unexpected and I daresay, nightmarish, occurred at a local Military Base."

The pop-up changes to show a short clip of some soldiers holding a position outside of a local medical clinic, firing their weapons at a series of fast moving, lupine, blurs. After a few seconds it changes to a view of a massive glowing wolf monster as it slaps a helicopter out of the air with a swipe of its paw. Then a short clip of a news reporter, Samantha Flair, as she reacts to the werewolves appearing in the street behind her. It changes again just as the camera man dropped his camera and ran. Then it shows a short, dark skinned, woman in a mish-mash of modern military wear, an old Greek style shield, and a sharpened stick, flying through the air in blurry, frame-by-frame, slow motion shot from far away as she leapt at the neck of the wolf monster.

"We also come to you with news...." Troy Lake continues. "Of what may be... the first ever.... documented.... super heroes. " He raises his eyebrows and tilts his head forward just a bit. "We'll have more on that, and several eye witness accounts, after this break and a brief rundown of the news. I'm Troy Lake, alongside Amanda Nunez, and once again this is CNN Ready News."

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Colonel Muhammed clicked off the small screen as she picked up the ringing phone in her office.

"He's here ma'am." Said the Lieutenant on the other side of the phone. "M-One is beginning touch down procedure as we speak."

"Understood." She replied as she hung up, stood up and adjusted her uniform.

She let out a long, exhausted, exhalation before walking to the door.

"Good evening Mr. President." She said softly, rehearsing, as she walked. "Welcome to Fort Irwin Mr. President." She said with a shake of her head. "Welcome to Inter-Dimensional Observation Post One Mr. President." She groaned as she said that one.

She paused for a second, tilting her head a bit as she took a deep breath.

"Welcome to the Shit Show Boss." She said with a nervous chuckle. "War crimes are buy one get one free, act fast."

A young MP walked past with an M.W.D. and gave her a confused look as he nodded and said, "Afternoon ma'am." She nodded and replied as he scurried away uncertainly.

Then she continued her nervous march toward the main doors of the facility.

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"I can't speak for this Colonel, your Majesty." Ambassador Werner said from where she stood in front of the King and his advisors. "I wasn't made aware of any other military operations occurring in secondary locations. And I certainly never would have expected such overt hostility of one either."

"Glad to hear." King Farrick responded with a hint of annoyance. "That doesn't change the fact that nearly three hundred Petravian Soldiers and Mages were killed in an attack that was initiated by the Military from your world, who were actively invading my country. Which I will remind you was officially recognized as YOUR ALLY." He said as he held up several documents from his table. They all recognized the signatures of both the King and the reportedly dead Secretary of Defense and General from Earth.

Werner held her hands up in a placating gesture.

"Yes... Sir." She said somewhat awkwardly. "This is a, pardon my language, fuck up... of the highest order. It never should have happened."

"I understand." The King continued, ignoring her placation. "That the captain and his comrades were originally brought to this world in.... less than ideal circumstances. But we've explained that HOW they were brought here was incidental to solving a larger issue." He jabbed his finger at the desk as he spoke. "But we have done everything in our power to accommodate the Captain, Chief Vickers, Captain Choi's newly arrived family and friend. AND.... yourself ambassador. We're even teaching YOU," He poked his finger at her angrily. "magic from what I understand."

He slammed his hand on the papers, sending them sliding a bit even as Werner flinched from the unexpected noise.

"I didn't believe Vickers' story even as I heard it. But at least it had some level of plausibility." He almost yelled. "But there is... NO.... justifiable reason for what has happened this time." He pointed past her at the doors to the chamber. "I have a Healing ward full of the wounded. A pile of dead soldiers from both sides. And a mass of charred remains and glassed sand out in the dessert. This was an invasion of both my country and my world. There is no other name for it." He spat, the veins on his neck straining as he spoke. "By all rights I should have you imprisoned alongside these soldiers of yours." He poked at the scattered papers. "Consider yourself lucky that IIIIIII know how to honor legal agreements and will treat your prisoners with the respect and rights afforded to them by our agreements." He stood up and glared at her. "FOR AS LONG.... AS I DEEM THEM WORTHY OF BEING HONORED!"

Werner tried to reply as the King began to move toward the exit, a pair of royal guards flanking him as he moved. But he held up a finger.

"Speak to your little box. Salvage whatever you can of this... this... this MESS!" He yelled. "And pray that whatever they say or offer is enough to keep your people from the axe."

Then the door opened and he stormed out. Leaving her standing their awkwardly in front of the few remaining dignitaries.

\----------

Despite having a chronometer built into his suit that was accurate down to a one hundredth of a second, Driscoll didn't know how long he had been in the small room. The time display on his HUD seemed to speed and slow at random intervals that he hadn't been able to parse just yet. Part of him wondered if it was just his perception that had changed it. But no, the timestamps on his recording feeds didn't match up either.

It didn't help that the small room was completely devoid of detail. Not just in the sense of being boring either. It was made of a completely flat, almost glass like, grey stone, as if it were the most expertly polished concrete in existence.

He'd hammered at it with his one remaining fist for the first "Day" of being here. He'd hit the grey material hard enough that he could have peeled open a tank. But the "stone" hadn't so much as chipped.

Curiously, his suit also read that there was ZERO breathable air outside of it. Not just that there was no Oxygen or Hydrogen anything like that. Instead its sensors read the space in the room as being virtually empty, as though he was in a vacuum. Typically that would be an issue. Their suits could handle vacuums, albeit not as well as deep sea conditions, but they would run out of air.

Yet his re-breather's levels hadn't even budged in the days(?) that he'd been in here.

His mind ached as it attempted to figure out what was happening to him.

He remembered falling down while bundled in the spider webs. Remembered impacting the floor.

Then he'd passed out for an indeterminate amount of time and he'd woken up without the webs, and in this grey room.

He wondered if the Major had suffered a similar fate. And if she had, was she also breathing without a tangible atmosphere? Was she starving? He should have been, he hadn't eaten anything except nutrition paste, which would keep him alive and moving with its high caloric intake. But even with artificially regulate bowels it still let him feel hunger pangs. How would someone without that do with however long they'd gone without eating.

It was as he was thinking this that his view changed.

Suddenly, instead of standing in a room of grey stone, he was looking at a room with a small number of people in it.

He tried to move, but as he did his HUD gave him pressure warnings on his arms and legs. He looked at his side camera views and saw that his remaining arm was encased in some kind of dark, slightly pulsing, material. So was his left shoulder, which still had no arm, and both of his legs. There was also a band of the stuff around his waist.

"An interesting mind you have there Mr. Driscoll." Said a voice that was equal parts smooth, and nasal. "We had thought you some kind of advanced construct, and you are. But you are also a man. Yet your mind perceives itself as your... body, such as it is.... appears."

His attention snapped forward to the tall, thin, man who was speaking. His eyes glowed a dull red as he looked at Driscoll.

"Who are you?" He asked. "Where am I?"

"Where you are is unimportant." One of the other people, whose eyes also glowed dull red, said as they stood beside the first man. This one was a short dwarven man. "But we... are the ones that your Captain Choi has likely warned you about."

"We." They said in perfect unison, and two other people joined them. But not everyone present did. **"Are the Agency. And we have an offer for you."**

\----------

Navarro panted as he ran.

He could hear the other wolves beside him. Could smell them. They were panting too. They all stank of blood and sweat and countless other odors that had come from the long fight throughout the town.

It was as they had seen Champion Dranek fall that they had all received the final message from their new goddess. He still wasn't completely sold on the concept of a god. But the fact that the other wolves had received the same message in their minds, word for word, spoke to its authenticity.

And so now they were running.

Their.... pack... would head north, into the woods and cold that would make it difficult to follow them or maintain visual. Another pack headed south, towards larger population centers and warmer climates, that they might spread their numbers more rapidly.

A third pack, those who had refused to run or simply been to engrossed in their newfound powers and senses, had stayed to wreak as much havoc as they could. They were all but guaranteed to fall. Navarro had seen, hell had fought alongside this very pack, just to get free of the military forces surrounding the area. Only their newly bolstered numbers had gained their freedom for them.

That and the fact that the soldiers hadn't been prepared for ACTUAL werewolves despite the commands and intel they'd no doubt received.

Still, they had lost nearly a dozen of this packs original thirty.

And now he and the others were running. He didn't know how they would know when they'd gone far enough. Whether the goddess would notify them of safety, or if they'd have to determine it for themselves.

All he knew was that his enhanced hearing and smell could still detect the helicopters and other vehicles trailing them.

So for now, they continued forward.

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Gila'na and Morl'yn were enjoying a day of fishing when it happened.

As always Mo was catching more fish than Gila was as the two young elves sat in their small boat, tethered to the shore where their parents were working on laundry. This always mildly annoyed Mo as it made him feel like he was the only one doing anything. But Gila made up for it by singing the songs he'd learned in their village song classes. Gila had the best voice of any of the boys their age, and as mad as his laziness made Mo, Mo still enjoyed music. Even if he himself couldn't hold a not with a net.

But Morl'yn could fish, that was for sure.

Gila had been singing the song of the River Maiden, the spirit who was married to the ancient caretaker of the forest lands, when their bolt had jolted and Gila had let out a quick yelp in surprise.

Then they'd begun drifting.

"What was that Gi?" Morl had asked.

"I don't know Mo." The young blond elf had said. "But something weird just happened to the water. And I think it just loosed our line."

"What?" Morl'yn wondered as he looked back.

"That's incredibly odd." Gila said as he looked at the disturbance.

Morl'yn only saw the odd cavity in the lake surface for a moment, then had to brace himself in the boat as it began to move.

"Oh gods Mo!" Gila exclaimed. "It's pulling us in."

"What?" Morl'yn asked. "What is?"

"Whatever cut our line!" Gila replied. "HELP! MOTHER! FATHER!"

"What in the hells-" Morl'yn was on the verge of asking as he struggled to turn around.

Then he saw the vortex that was forming around what appeared to be a space of.... well... nothing, as far as he could tell.

Whatever it was, the lake was flowing into it, and them along with it.

"GI!" He yelled as they neared the empty space. "GET O-"

Before he could finish the statement he startled as he felt cold water splash his back, and heard his brother yell, "MO!"

Then, as their parents ran into the lake feebly, and as the trees near the shore began to vanish near their crowns, the two elves, and their boat, disappeared.

\------------------------

Defiance looked at the scene below with mild fascination as the small, primarily Elven, village was devoured. As a god he had all the knowledge of the Cleanser that the other gods did. He could even dismiss the thing if he wanted.

But that wasn't his role in all of this.

"That's gonna be a tough one to deal with." He said with a shrug. "Well.... Back home I guess."

He shimmered green for a moment, in that space that only THEY could access fully. Then he switched dimensions.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z4ucfd/wait_is_this_just_gate_268/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (267/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z29a0h/wait_is_this_just_gate_266/) /
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Writer's note: Tomorrow is Turkey Day and I intend to get absolutely ***WHITE-GIRL-WASTED*** *on some gravy and cranberry sauce soaked bird meat. Plus good ole fashioned regular wasted on beer and family drama. So I aint gonna be on here. I will be back friday. Then it'll be the weekend.*

In the mean time. Let's check up on some stuff that got set aside (temporarily) in favor of explosions and drama.

PARTY ON WAYNE!!!

Enjoy.

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"Good evening folks." Says the well dressed man sitting at the table. "I'm Troy Lake." He gestures to the equally well dressed woman seated next to him who smiles and gives a small wave. "This is Amanda Nunez, here live at CNN Ready News."

The camera pans over a bit to focus on just him, with a small pop up next to him showing an image of three silhouetted figures that are made to look like generic super heroes.

"We come to you tonight with the news, which Amanda and I will go over rather quickly after our first commercial break. But first lets address the uh... WOLF... in the room." He says with a coy smirk at the lazy joke. "Last night at approximately six thirty in the evening, outside the town of Sturgis, South Dakota -typically known for its yearly motorcycle festival- something entirely unexpected and I daresay, nightmarish, occurred at a local Military Base."

The pop-up changes to show a short clip of some soldiers holding a position outside of a local medical clinic, firing their weapons at a series of fast moving, lupine, blurs. After a few seconds it changes to a view of a massive glowing wolf monster as it slaps a helicopter out of the air with a swipe of its paw. Then a short clip of a news reporter, Samantha Flair, as she reacts to the werewolves appearing in the street behind her. It changes again just as the camera man dropped his camera and ran. Then it shows a short, dark skinned, woman in a mish-mash of modern military wear, an old Greek style shield, and a sharpened stick, flying through the air in blurry, frame-by-frame, slow motion shot from far away as she leapt at the neck of the wolf monster.

"We also come to you with news...." Troy Lake continues. "Of what may be... the first ever.... documented.... super heroes. " He raises his eyebrows and tilts his head forward just a bit. "We'll have more on that, and several eye witness accounts, after this break and a brief rundown of the news. I'm Troy Lake, alongside Amanda Nunez, and once again this is CNN Ready News."

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Colonel Muhammed clicked off the small screen as she picked up the ringing phone in her office.

"He's here ma'am." Said the Lieutenant on the other side of the phone. "M-One is beginning touch down procedure as we speak."

"Understood." She replied as she hung up, stood up and adjusted her uniform.

She let out a long, exhausted, exhalation before walking to the door.

"Good evening Mr. President." She said softly, rehearsing, as she walked. "Welcome to Fort Irwin Mr. President." She said with a shake of her head. "Welcome to Inter-Dimensional Observation Post One Mr. President." She groaned as she said that one.

She paused for a second, tilting her head a bit as she took a deep breath.

"Welcome to the Shit Show Boss." She said with a nervous chuckle. "War crimes are buy one get one free, act fast."

A young MP walked past with an M.W.D. and gave her a confused look as he nodded and said, "Afternoon ma'am." She nodded and replied as he scurried away uncertainly.

Then she continued her nervous march toward the main doors of the facility.

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"I can't speak for this Colonel, your Majesty." Ambassador Werner said from where she stood in front of the King and his advisors. "I wasn't made aware of any other military operations occurring in secondary locations. And I certainly never would have expected such overt hostility of one either."

"Glad to hear." King Farrick responded with a hint of annoyance. "That doesn't change the fact that nearly three hundred Petravian Soldiers and Mages were killed in an attack that was initiated by the Military from your world, who were actively invading my country. Which I will remind you was officially recognized as YOUR ALLY." He said as he held up several documents from his table. They all recognized the signatures of

both the King and the reportedly dead Secretary of Defense and General from Earth.

Werner held her hands up in a placating gesture.

"Yes... Sir." She said somewhat awkwardly. "This is a, pardon my language, fuck up... of the highest order. It never should have happened."

"I understand." The King continued, ignoring her placation. "That the captain and his comrades were originally brought to this world in.... less than ideal circumstances. But we've explained that HOW they were brought here was incidental to solving a larger issue." He jabbed his finger at the desk as he spoke. "But we have done everything in our power to accommodate the Captain, Chief Vickers, Captain Choi's newly arrived family and friend. AND.... yourself ambassador. We're even teaching YOU," He poked his finger at her angrily. "magic from what I understand."

He slammed his hand on the papers, sending them sliding a bit even as Werner flinched from the unexpected noise.

"I didn't believe Vickers' story even as I heard it. But at least it had some level of plausibility." He almost yelled. "But there is... NO.... justifiable reason for what has happened this time." He pointed past her at the doors to the chamber. "I have a Healing ward full of the wounded. A pile of dead soldiers from both sides. And a mass of charred remains and glassed sand out in the dessert. This was an invasion of both my country and my world. There is no other name for it." He spat, the veins on his neck straining as he spoke. "By all rights I should have you imprisoned alongside these soldiers of yours." He poked at the scattered papers. "Consider yourself lucky that IIIIIII know how to honor legal agreements and will treat your prisoners with the respect and rights afforded to them by our agreements." He stood up and glared at her. "FOR AS LONG.... AS I DEEM THEM WORTHY OF BEING HONORED!"

Werner tried to reply as the King began to move toward the exit, a pair of royal guards flanking him as he moved. But he held up a finger.

"Speak to your little box. Salvage whatever you can of this... this... this MESS!" He yelled. "And pray that whatever they say or offer is enough to keep your people from the axe."

Then the door opened and he stormed out. Leaving her standing their awkwardly in front of the few remaining dignitaries.

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Despite having a chronometer built into his suit that was accurate down to a one hundredth of a second, Driscoll didn't know how long he had been in the small room. The time display on his HUD seemed to speed and slow at random intervals that he hadn't been able to parse just yet. Part of him wondered if it was just his perception that had changed it. But no, the timestamps on his recording feeds didn't match up either.

It didn't help that the small room was completely devoid of detail. Not just in the sense of being boring either. It was made of a completely flat, almost glass like, grey stone, as if it were the most expertly polished concrete in existence.

He'd hammered at it with his one remaining fist for the first "Day" of being here. He'd hit the grey material hard enough that he could have peeled open a tank. But the "stone" hadn't so much as chipped.

Curiously, his suit also read that there was ZERO breathable air outside of it. Not just that there was no Oxygen or Hydrogen anything like that. Instead its sensors read the space in the room as being virtually empty, as though he was in a vacuum. Typically that would be an issue. Their suits could handle vacuums, albeit not as well as deep sea conditions, but they would run out of air.

Yet his re-breather's levels hadn't even budged in the days(?) that he'd been in here.

His mind ached as it attempted to figure out what was happening to him.

He remembered falling down while bundled in the spider webs. Remembered impacting the floor.

Then he'd passed out for an indeterminate amount of time and he'd woken up without the webs, and in this grey room.

He wondered if the Major had suffered a similar fate. And if she had, was she also breathing without a tangible atmosphere? Was she starving? He should have been, he hadn't eaten anything except nutrition paste, which would keep him alive and moving with its high caloric intake. But even with artificially regulate bowels it still let him feel hunger pangs. How would someone without that do with however long they'd gone without eating.

It was as he was thinking this that his view changed.

Suddenly, instead of standing in a room of grey stone, he was looking at a room with a small number of people in it.

He tried to move, but as he did his HUD gave him pressure warnings on his arms and legs. He looked at his side camera views and saw that his remaining arm was encased in some kind of dark, slightly pulsing, material. So was his left shoulder, which still had no arm, and both of his legs. There was also a band of the stuff around his waist.

"An interesting mind you have there Mr. Driscoll." Said a voice that was equal parts smooth, and nasal. "We had thought you some kind of advanced construct, and you are. But you are also a man. Yet your mind perceives itself as your... body, such as it is.... appears."

His attention snapped forward to the tall, thin, man who was speaking. His eyes glowed a dull red as he looked at Driscoll.

"Who are you?" He asked. "Where am I?"

"Where you are is unimportant." One of the other people, whose eyes also glowed dull red, said as they stood beside the first man. This one was a short dwarven man. "But we... are the ones that your Captain Choi has likely warned you about."

"We." They said in perfect unison, and two other people joined them. But not everyone present did. **"Are the Agency. And we have an offer for you."**

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Navarro panted as he ran.

He could hear the other wolves beside him. Could smell them. They were panting too. They all stank of blood and sweat and countless other odors that had come from the long fight throughout the town.

It was as they had seen Champion Dranek fall that they had all received the final message from their new goddess. He still wasn't completely sold on the concept of a god. But the fact that the other wolves had received the same message in their minds, word for word, spoke to its authenticity.

And so now they were running.

Their.... pack... would head north, into the woods and cold that would make it difficult to follow them or maintain visual. Another pack headed south, towards larger population centers and warmer climates, that they might spread their numbers more rapidly.

A third pack, those who had refused to run or simply been to engrossed in their newfound powers and senses, had stayed to wreak as much havoc as they could. They were all but guaranteed to fall. Navarro had seen, hell had fought alongside this very pack, just to get free of the military forces surrounding the area. Only their newly bolstered numbers had gained their freedom for them.

That and the fact that the soldiers hadn't been prepared for ACTUAL werewolves despite the commands and intel they'd no doubt received.

Still, they had lost nearly a dozen of this packs original thirty.

And now he and the others were running. He didn't know how they would know when they'd gone far enough. Whether the goddess would notify them of safety, or if they'd have to determine it for themselves.

All he knew was that his enhanced hearing and smell could still detect the helicopters and other vehicles trailing them.

So for now, they continued forward.

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Gila'na and Morl'yn were enjoying a day of fishing when it happened.

As always Mo was catching more fish than Gila was as the two young elves sat in their small boat, tethered to the shore where their parents were working on laundry. This always mildly annoyed Mo as it made him feel like he was the only one doing anything. But Gila made up for it by singing the songs he'd learned in their village song classes. Gila had the best voice of any of the boys their age, and as mad as his laziness made Mo, Mo still enjoyed music. Even if he himself couldn't hold a not with a net.

But Morl'yn could fish, that was for sure.

Gila had been singing the song of the River Maiden, the spirit who was married to the ancient caretaker of the forest lands, when their boat had jolted and Gila had let out a quick yelp in surprise.

Then they'd begun drifting.

"What was that Gi?" Morl had asked.

"I don't know Mo." The young blond elf had said. "But something weird just happened to the water. And I think it just loosed our line."

"What?" Morl'yn wondered as he looked back.

"That's incredibly odd." Gila said as he looked at the disturbance.

Morl'yn only saw the odd cavity in the lake surface for a moment, then had to brace himself in the boat as it began to move.

"Oh gods Mo!" Gila exclaimed. "It's pulling us in."

"What?" Morl'yn asked. "What is?"

"Whatever cut our line!" Gila replied. "HELP! MOTHER! FATHER!"

"What in the hells-" Morl'yn was on the verge of asking as he struggled to turn around.

Then he saw the vortex that was forming around what appeared to be a space of.... well... nothing, as far as he could tell.

Whatever it was, the lake was flowing into it, and them along with it.

"GI!" He yelled as they neared the empty space. "GET O-"

Before he could finish the statement he startled as he felt cold water splash his back, and heard his brother yell, "MO!"

Then, as their parents ran into the lake feebly, and as the trees near the shore began to vanish near their crowns, the two elves, and their boat, disappeared.

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Defiance looked at the scene below with mild fascination as the small, primarily Elven, village was devoured. As a god he had all the knowledge of the Cleanser that the other gods did. He could even dismiss the thing if he wanted.

But that wasn't his role in all of this.

"That's gonna be a tough one to deal with." He said with a shrug. "Well.... Back home I guess."

He shimmered green for a moment, in that space that only THEY could access fully. Then he switched dimensions.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z4u9za/wait_is_this_just_gate_268/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (266/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z1dxci/wait_is_this_just_gate_265/)

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LOL. As if.

Enjoy.

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Vickers hand ached as he sealed the letter and dabbed a bit of melted wax onto it with a hastily scrawled "V" as it cooled. The letter done, he handed it to the messenger. As the young woman walked away with the message he massaged his hand and used his magic to ice it over. The healers had put the bones back well enough, but the injured limb still needed more time to completely knit back together.

That bit of business done he got up and stretched as he walked over to the new location for the door back to the desert. He still had to go get Tom and at least attempt to get Choi's drake back on this side of things. Last they'd seen of the two critters they'd been holed up in a hasty Army stable where the Petravians had staged for the fight.

He stopped by the healer's ward on the way to the door. A simple check in to make sure nobody important had died.

He was surprised to see the Muck Marcher he'd beaten to a pulp still alive, albeit in a coma, and surrounded by the technicians that maintained the elite troops. Two of them worked feverishly at the unconscious "Body" of the woman while inside of a section of plastic

sheeting that appeared to be sealed and pressurized. They wore hazmat suits with re-breathers, and a set of shackles on their ankles as Petravian guards watched them with crossbows at the ready.

He simply shrugged and continued walking.

One of the healers asked if he needed any help and he declined, simply asking for directions instead.

After a minute of quietly walking past all the soldiers, both Petravian and Earth born, he found the room he was looking for.

Choi and the princess slumbered, monitored by healers and covered in glowing green bandages. On the other side of the room the little mage, little Choi, and mama Choi slept. Though, Mrs Choi did so in a chair rather than a bed. She held her younger sons hand in hers as she slept.

Satisfied that everyone was going to live, scars or not, Vickers quietly left and regained the path to the door.

Lotta people died pointless fuckin deaths. He thought as he quietly walked down the halls. *But for an unexpected bit of treason that didn't go too badly.*

He paused in his tracks as he considered the implications of the admitted fact.

No going back now. He thought, and was glad he'd sent off the request.

Next time something like this happened he wouldn't need to worry about broken bones.

\--------------------------

"So you're telling me that those, 'other versions of me' were just piggybacking the energy from this very conversation to send me a message?" James asked, confusion evident on his face.

Defiance nodded his head. He now wore the form of an old World War Two era corpsman, having traded out his arrow riddled form for one that was easier to sit down in. Which he was doing as he snacked on a croissant slathered in honey.

"How's that even work?" James asked.

"It doesn't." Defiance said simply. "But time travel- in any form -is like that. That's why movies never get it right." It sipped at a bottle of Gatorade as it washed the croissant down and James wondered what the point was if the food wasn't even real. "But it DID work because they were piggybacking MY energy."

"Because you break rules?" James mused.

Defiance teetered back and forth for a moment.

"More like, conveniently ignore for maximum impact at key moments." It pointed at him. "Something you and your fellow mafia members are pros at."

"Mafia?" James asked.

Defiance held up its hands in a mock gang sign that normal human hands wouldn't be capable of without breaking some bones first.

"E-four mafia wassup." It said, dragging the last word out to last a few extra seconds.

James stared at the painfully contorted fingers in confusion.

"I've only met one other god before and you somehow still take the cake as the weirdest." He said after a moment. "Why the hell would I want to be your champion?"

"You don't." Defiance replied. "And that's what makes you perfect for it. And when the time comes you'll be given the power you need to do what otherwise CAN'T be done. Just like you always do."

"And I get no say in this?"

"Course you do." Defiance said with a grin. "You can always accept the powers happily."

"But that's what I DON'T want. I want nothing to do with you gods." James countered.

"Which is the exact reason you'll get them."

"What?" He asked, confused. "How does-"

"Don't think about it too hard." Defiance said. "Or do. I'm a god, not the thought police. I don't care."

James ran his hands over his face in exasperation. The two of them had been going around in circles for what felt like an hour now, assuming time mattered here.

"Okay why?" He asked in a strained voice. "Why help me?"

Defiance shrugged. "Because you resist. You... You. You get back up. You always get back up. Even when you've been beat to within an inch of your life you just, fuckin', keep going. Goddam energizer bunny shit man." It took another bite of the croissant. "Plus your story kicked off the chain of events that led to my creation. Or, you know, ACTUALLY gaining sentience and joining the pantheon. I always existed."

"Wait, really?" James asked.

"Yeah." It said simply. "Granted, it was always going to happen. Destiny and all that. But still. It's nice to get a bit of stretch in the metaphysical legs, you know?"

"Destiny?" James wondered quietly.

"Another thing to NOT think too hard about if you can help it." Defiance said as he stood up and dusted croissant crumbs off of the front of his uniform. "Me being here or not, it gets you either way." It nodded with a bit of a cringe. "Admittedly not ALL gods get that. Even though they're the ones that write the damn thing. But meh." It shrugged again. "They have fates too. Strings for the puppets, and for the puppeteers."

"Are you.... supposed to be telling me all this?" James wondered.

"GREAT QUESTION!" Defiance boomed as it rubbed its hands. The volume of its voice was so high that it made James's semi-real head ache.

Then it slapped him, full on, max strength for a normal body (or at least he assumed as much since a godly level slap would presumably erase him from history or something), right across his face.

He had a moment to wonder, *What the fuck!*

Then he gasped a deep breath as his view reverted back to that of the Healing Ward's ceiling, and all the pain of his body's injuries came screaming back into his mind.

"WHAT THE-!" He began before realizing that there were probably other people in the room. "What the fuck!?!" He hissed to himself.

Then he looked around and saw his family around him in varying states of unconsciousness.

Amina was in the bed to his left, bandages unable to hide the long black hair that flowed down over one of her shoulders. She snored ever so lightly as she slept. Joey was in the bed almost directly across from him, a band with a strange coin or medallion of some kind on his forehead. He could sense the magic in the item and wondered at it. Veliry was in the bed next to that one, a dull green glow emanating from around her waist that he'd have to ask about later. His mother lay with her head on the side of Joey's bed, his bandaged hand wrapped up in hers.

James slowly, and excruciatingly, rolled over onto his wolf arm. The damn thing, like always, seemed to be the first part of him that was even remotely healed. It still protested to the abuse as it steadied him uncertainly. Something in his abdomen shifted uncomfortably as he rolled, reminding him that he had been impaled several times in the course of the fight. He groaned a bit as he felt something settle inside him and wondered just how well healing magic did for internal injuries that the healer might not be able to see. Or if they'd gotten all the sand out of him.

After several long, pain filled, minutes James managed to stand up on shaky legs.

The irony of the last few things the so-called GOD of Defiance had told him was not lost on him as he managed the accomplishment.

He made a slow trip over to the small dresser nearby and opened it. He was happy to see that his suspicions about it were right, and a little upset that he was getting so familiar with these kinds of rooms.

He took the light blanket and small pillow over to his mother and lifted her head gently, just enough to slide the pillow under. Then he draped the blanket over her as she unconsciously nuzzled into the cushion.

He shook Joey's foot just a little bit as he walked past him and over to Amina's bed.

It took everything he had to bend over and plant a kiss on her forehead. Then he sat on the edge of the bed, woozy from all the physical exertion that simply crossing the room had caused.

He wanted to teeter over and fall face first onto the ground. But he knew that doing so would likely hurt him even more. And he didn't have the energy to get back up and go to his own bed. So he sat there for untold minutes, hand resting over Amina's, until one of the aides came in to check everyone and realized that he'd gotten up. They quickly called for the other healers, and James was back to sleep in bed before he even knew what was going on again.

Even half delirious from pain and exhaustion, James latched onto the fact that he hadn't lost anyone this time.

It was a nice change of pace from his last few big battles.

He went back under to the gently warm amber glow of healing magic.

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Jenkins looked at the form of the massive wolf from on top of what had used to be a perfectly good pickup truck.

It whimpered in a way that reminded her of how her parents dog had begun to sound as its arthritis had been getting to its final stages and it hadn't been able to lift itself. The wolf couldn't get up either. Its legs shook and quivered as it struggled to move. One of its eyes stared at her with a look that she thought might have been caught between a sad fear and a burning anger.

The massive, for lack of a better word, Hulk of a man who had battered the wolf along side her and the Wizard, came strolling around the side of the wolf with a cocksure swagger as they made a show of wiping their hands off. Something about the gesture seemed crass to her when next to a dying dog. Even one the size of a 747 that had just wrecked most of a town.

"Yeah!" Said the massive man, his shirtless muscles rippling with every movement as he walked over towards her and the wizard. "That's what you get for messing with me!" He said as he stared down the dying wolf monster.

Jenkins winced at the awkward display of bravado.

"Let me guess." Said the deep, and slightly Spanish accented wizard as he leaned on the gnarled staff that looked familiar to her. "Some weird voice offered you powers?"

She looked at him hesitantly, uncertain of whether she should reveal that she'd heard voices. But then again, he just had.

"Yeah." She said awkwardly. "Didn't exactly accept them though."

"I was about to ask." The wizard said. "Neither did I."

"Sup." Said the muscular man. Jenkins just stared at him as he walked over. "You guys talk to some douchey, supposed 'GOD'?" He asked as he made air quotes.

The wizard was on the verge of answering when the man continued speaking.

"I was on the verge of getting noshed on by one of the small ones when it spoke up. Made some big speech about how I had a DEFIANT SOUL or some nonsense." He shrugged. "I told it that it could either give me the powers or it could fuck off and let me focus on dying. Next thing I knew I was goin all Lou Ferrigno up in here." He flexed his comically large arms like a body builder for a second.

Then three things happened.

The wizard fell over onto the ground, landing awkwardly on his hands and knees as the armor from his body was replaced by a tattered set of construction workers clothes, white helmet and reflective vest included.

At the same time, the Hulking man seemed to shrink down at a rapid rate. Though Jenkins realized very quickly that it wasn't so much that He was shrinking quickly, as it was that she was simultaneously growing.

"Aw fuck!" The now average sized guy in a faded denim vest with several band patches and buttons on it exclaimed as he tripped over his own feet backing away. "It's one of them!"

Jenkins looked down in horror to see that her hands were once again furred and ended in claws. She reached up and touched her face, feeling the snout and the teeth once more.

"NO!" She cried in anguish as she backed away and fell awkwardly off of the wrecked truck. "No! I was me again!" She yelled in her once again deep, rumbling voice.

"You were one of them?" The construction wizard asked in confusion as he regained his feet. "Wait, they can talk?"

She cowered against the remains of a bus stop as she pawed at her nose and body in desperation.

"Put me back." She cried. "Put me back. Give me my body back. This isn't what I want."

"Shit." Said the former hulk who now looked like a punk band front-man as he cautiously stepped toward her. "They do talk."

"I was a person again." She said softly. "I'm not supposed to be a monster. I'm a person." She covered her nose with her clawed hands. "Too many smells."

"Hey." The punk said as he kneeled a few feet from her. "It's gonna be-"

Suddenly the area around the three of them was flooded with bright white light as a helicopter flew in low and slow and took position over them. Soldiers flooded around the corner of the pharmacy that the bus stop was next to. The soldiers were all in various states of dissarray and gore soaked messiness as they surrounded both the massive, dying wolf, and the three formerly powered individuals.

The punk and the construction worker both shot to their feet, hands raised as the soldiers surrounded them.

"ON YOUR KNEES!" One soldier yelled.

Jenkins stood up as all the weapons of the soldiers trained on her. She hung her head in defeat as she realized how they saw her now.

"I'm one of you!" She yelled in her wolfen voice. "Corporal Samantha Jenkins! DOD number two eight five, three eight-"

"Drop the wolf!" One of the soldiers yelled.

POP!

She fell to a knee as a rifle round slammed into her thigh and took her leg out from under her.

"Agh!" She cried. "No I'm-"

POP! PO-POP! PO-PO-PO-POP! A series of rapid bursts of rifle fire reported as they slammed into her repeatedly.

She dropped to the ground in excruciating pain as everything went dim.

"Secure the supers!" A loud, amplified, voice said from the helicopter. "Bring them in!"

"What are you doing?" Asked the construction worker as a pair of soldiers grabbed his wrists and maneuvered them behind him. "She's one of the ones that stopped that thing!" He yelled as they slid a pair of restraints on his wrists.

"Yo! You just killed one of the so-called SUPERS!" The punk yelled as he struggled to get loose from three of the soldiers. He spit at one of them as they grabbed his vest to hold him in place. "She was the freakin' amazon chick."

"That's impossible." Said one of the soldiers. "That was a human not a wolf."

"And I was the fuckin hulk dude!" The punk said. "Minus the green paint and bad CGI but that was me. How do I fuckin look now?"

"Get the fuck out of here." Said the same soldier.

"Dude." The punk said, gesturing at the construction worker with his head. "He was the wizard. I was the hulk. SHE was the amazon. We just like... I don't know, powered down or whatever just now."

The Sergeant leading the securing of the people that were widely being referred to as "Supers" radioed up to the chopper.

"You guys sure these are the ones that did it?" She asked. "That intel good? Cause I can see it with the wizard guy being bob the builder. But.... where'd the other two go?"

"Copy that ground." The helicopter's copilot replied. "Getting confirmation from command. But these are the ones they sent us to retrieve. Them and the big bad wolf. This is this spot we were dispatched to."

The Sergeant looked down at the wolf as it took ragged breaths and bled onto the pavement.

"Roger." The helicopter spoke up again. "Ground team. Command confirms. Those two AND the wolf are the ones that brought it down. Have your medics try to stabilize the wolf and bring them in too."

The Sergeant looked down at her radio with a bit of confusion.

"DOOOOC!" She yelled to the cluster of soldiers near the massive wolf monster, which had ceased moving. "Get over here!"

"I fuckin told you!" The Punk yelled as they were ushered away towards a waiting SUV. "Bunch o' assholes!"

And for the second time in a matter of hours, as the medic rushed over to her and nervously began attempting to treat her, Samantha Jenkins lingered on the border between life and death. Though this time she didn't have to worry as much, not that she was aware of it.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z336vo/wait_is_this_just_gate_267/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (266/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z1dvfp/wait_is_this_just_gate_265/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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That bit of business done he got up and stretched as he walked over to the new location for the door back to the desert. He still had to go get Tom and at least attempt to get Choi's drake back on this side of things. Last they'd seen of the two critters they'd been holed up in a hasty Army stable where the Petravians had staged for the fight.

He stopped by the healer's ward on the way to the door. A simple check in to make sure nobody important had died.

He was surprised to see the Muck Marcher he'd beaten to a pulp still alive, albeit in a coma, and surrounded by the technicians that maintained the elite troops. Two of them worked feverishly at the unconscious "Body" of the woman while inside of a section of plastic sheeting that appeared to be sealed and pressurized. They wore hazmat suits with re-breathers, and a set of shackles on their ankles as Petravian guards watched them with crossbows at the ready.

He simply shrugged and continued walking.

One of the healers asked if he needed any help and he declined, simply asking for directions instead.

After a minute of quietly walking past all the soldiers, both Petravian and Earth born, he found the room he was looking for.

Choi and the princess slumbered, monitored by healers and covered in glowing green bandages. On the other side of the room the little mage,

little Choi, and mama Choi slept. Though, Mrs Choi did so in a chair rather than a bed. She held her younger sons hand in hers as she slept.

Satisfied that everyone was going to live, scars or not, Vickers quietly left and regained the path to the door.

Lotta people died pointless fuckin deaths. He thought as he quietly walked down the halls. *But for an unexpected bit of treason that didn't go too badly.*

He paused in his tracks as he considered the implications of the admitted fact.

No going back now. He thought, and was glad he'd sent off the request.

Next time something like this happened he wouldn't need to worry about broken bones.

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"So you're telling me that those, 'other versions of me' were just piggybacking the energy from this very conversation to send me a message?" James asked, confusion evident on his face.

Defiance nodded his head. He now wore the form of an old World War Two era corpsman, having traded out his arrow riddled form for one that was easier to sit down in. Which he was doing as he snacked on a croissant slathered in honey.

"How's that even work?" James asked.

"It doesn't." Defiance said simply. "But time travel- in any form -is like that. That's why movies never get it right." It sipped at a bottle of Gatorade as it washed the croissant down and James wondered what the point was if the food wasn't even real. "But it DID work because they were piggybacking MY energy."

"Because you break rules?" James mused.

Defiance teetered back and forth for a moment.

"More like, conveniently ignore for maximum impact at key moments." It pointed at him. "Something you and your fellow mafia members are pros at."

"Mafia?" James asked.

Defiance held up its hands in a mock gang sign that normal human hands wouldn't be capable of without breaking some bones first.

"E-four mafia wassup." It said, dragging the last word out to last a few extra seconds.

James stared at the painfully contorted fingers in confusion.

"I've only met one other god before and you somehow still take the cake as the weirdest." He said after a moment. "Why the hell would I want to be your champion?"

"You don't." Defiance replied. "And that's what makes you perfect for it. And when the time comes you'll be given the power you need to do what otherwise CAN'T be done. Just like you always do."

"And I get no say in this?"

"Course you do." Defiance said with a grin. "You can always accept the powers happily."

"But that's what I DON'T want. I want nothing to do with you gods." James countered.

"Which is the exact reason you'll get them."

"What?" He asked, confused. "How does-"

"Don't think about it too hard." Defiance said. "Or do. I'm a god, not the thought police. I don't care."

James ran his hands over his face in exasperation. The two of them had been going around in circles for what felt like an hour now, assuming time mattered here.

"Okay why?" He asked in a strained voice. "Why help me?"

Defiance shrugged. "Because you resist. You... You. You get back up. You always get back up. Even when you've been beat to within an inch of your life you just, fuckin', keep going. Goddam energizer bunny shit man." It took another bite of the croissant. "Plus your story kicked off the chain of events that led to my creation. Or, you know, ACTUALLY gaining sentience and joining the pantheon. I always existed."

"Wait, really?" James asked.

"Yeah." It said simply. "Granted, it was always going to happen. Destiny and all that. But still. It's nice to get a bit of stretch in the metaphysical legs, you know?"

"Destiny?" James wondered quietly.

"Another thing to NOT think too hard about if you can help it." Defiance said as he stood up and dusted croissant crumbs off of the front of his uniform. "Me being here or not, it gets you either way." It nodded with a bit of a cringe. "Admittedly not ALL gods get that. Even though they're the ones that write the damn thing. But meh." It shrugged again. "They have fates too. Strings for the puppets, and for the puppeteers."

"Are you.... supposed to be telling me all this?" James wondered.

"GREAT QUESTION!" Defiance boomed as it rubbed its hands. The volume of its voice was so high that it made James's semi-real head ache.

Then it slapped him, full on, max strength for a normal body (or at least he assumed as much since a godly level slap would presumably erase him from history or something), right across his face.

He had a moment to wonder, *What the fuck!*

Then he gasped a deep breath as his view reverted back to that of the Healing Ward's ceiling, and all the pain of his body's injuries came screaming back into his mind.

"WHAT THE-!" He began before realizing that there were probably other people in the room. ^("What the fuck!?!") He hissed to himself.

Then he looked around and saw his family around him in varying states of unconsciousness.

Amina was in the bed to his left, bandages unable to hide the long black hair that flowed down over one of her shoulders. She snored ever so lightly as she slept. Joey was in the bed almost directly across from him, a band with a strange coin or medallion of some kind on his forehead. He could sense the magic in the item and wondered at it. Veliry was in the bed next to that one, a dull green glow emanating from around her waist that he'd have to ask about later. His mother lay with her head on the side of Joey's bed, his bandaged hand wrapped up in hers.

James slowly, and excruciatingly, rolled over onto his wolf arm. The damn thing, like always, seemed to be the first part of him that was even remotely healed. It still protested to the abuse as it steadied him uncertainly. Something in his abdomen shifted uncomfortably as he rolled, reminding him that he had been impaled several times in the course of the fight. He groaned a bit as he felt something settle inside him and wondered just how well healing magic did for internal injuries that the healer might not be able to see. Or if they'd gotten all the sand out of him.

After several long, pain filled, minutes James managed to stand up on shaky legs.

The irony of the last few things the so-called GOD of Defiance had told him was not lost on him as he managed the accomplishment.

He made a slow trip over to the small dresser nearby and opened it. He was happy to see that his suspicions about it were right, and a little upset that he was getting so familiar with these kinds of rooms.

He took the light blanket and small pillow over to his mother and lifted her head gently, just enough to slide the pillow under. Then he draped the blanket over her as she unconsciously nuzzled into the cushion.

He shook Joey's foot just a little bit as he walked past him and over to Amina's bed.

It took everything he had to bend over and plant a kiss on her forehead. Then he sat on the edge of the bed, woozy from all the physical exertion that simply crossing the room had caused.

He wanted to teeter over and fall face first onto the ground. But he knew that doing so would likely hurt him even more. And he didn't have the energy to get back up and go to his own bed. So he sat there for untold minutes, hand resting over Amina's, until one of the aides came in to check everyone and realized that he'd gotten up. They quickly called for the other healers, and James was back to sleep in bed before he even knew what was going on again.

Even half delirious from pain and exhaustion, James latched onto the fact that he hadn't lost anyone this time.

It was a nice change of pace from his last few big battles.

He went back under to the gently warm amber glow of healing magic.

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Jenkins looked at the form of the massive wolf from on top of what had used to be a perfectly good pickup truck.

It whimpered in a way that reminded her of how her parents dog had begun to sound as its arthritis had been getting to its final stages and it hadn't been able to lift itself. The wolf couldn't get up either. Its legs shook and quivered as it struggled to move. One of its eyes stared at her with a look that she thought might have been caught between a sad fear and a burning anger.

The massive, for lack of a better word, Hulk of a man who had battered the wolf along side her and the Wizard, came strolling around the side of the wolf with a cocksure swagger as they made a show of wiping their hands off. Something about the gesture seemed crass to her when next to a dying dog. Even one the size of a 747 that had just wrecked most of a town.

"Yeah!" Said the massive man, his shirtless muscles rippling with every movement as he walked over towards her and the wizard. "That's what you get for messing with me!" He said as he stared down the dying wolf monster.

Jenkins winced at the awkward display of bravado.

"Let me guess." Said the deep, and slightly Spanish accented wizard as he leaned on the gnarled staff that looked familiar to her. "Some weird voice offered you powers?"

She looked at him hesitantly, uncertain of whether she should reveal that she'd heard voices. But then again, he just had.

"Yeah." She said awkwardly. "Didn't exactly accept them though."

"I was about to ask." The wizard said. "Neither did I."

"Sup." Said the muscular man. Jenkins just stared at him as he walked over. "You guys talk to some douchey, supposed 'GOD'?" He asked as he made air quotes.

The wizard was on the verge of answering when the man continued speaking.

"I was on the verge of getting noshed on by one of the small ones when it spoke up. Made some big speech about how I had a DEFIANT SOUL or some nonsense." He shrugged. "I told it that it could either give me the powers or it could fuck off and let me focus on dying. Next thing I knew I was goin all Lou Ferrigno up in here." He flexed his comically large arms like a body builder for a second.

Then three things happened.

The wizard fell over onto the ground, landing awkwardly on his hands and knees as the armor from his body was replaced by a tattered set of construction workers clothes, white helmet and reflective vest included.

At the same time, the Hulking man seemed to shrink down at a rapid rate. Though Jenkins realized very quickly that it wasn't so much that He was shrinking quickly, as it was that she was simultaneously growing.

"Aw fuck!" The now average sized guy in a faded denim vest with several band patches and buttons on it exclaimed as he tripped over his own feet backing away. "It's one of them!"

Jenkins looked down in horror to see that her hands were once again furred and ended in claws. She reached up and touched her face, feeling the snout and the teeth once more.

"NO!" She cried in anguish as she backed away and fell awkwardly off of the wrecked truck. "No! I was me again!" She yelled in her once again deep, rumbling voice.

"You were one of them?" The construction wizard asked in confusion as he regained his feet. "Wait, they can talk?"

She cowered against the remains of a bus stop as she pawed at her nose and body in desperation.

"Put me back." She cried. "Put me back. Give me my body back. This isn't what I want."

"Shit." Said the former hulk who now looked like a punk band front-man as he cautiously stepped toward her. "They do talk."

"I was a person again." She said softly. "I'm not supposed to be a monster. I'm a person." She covered her nose with her clawed hands. "Too many smells."

"Hey." The punk said as he kneeled a few feet from her. "It's gonna be-"

Suddenly the area around the three of them was flooded with bright white light as a helicopter flew in low and slow and took position over them. Soldiers flooded around the corner of the pharmacy that the bus stop was next to. The soldiers were all in various states of dissarray and gore soaked messiness as they surrounded both the massive, dying wolf, and the three formerly powered individuals.

The punk and the construction worker both shot to their feet, hands raised as the soldiers surrounded them.

"ON YOUR KNEES!" One soldier yelled.

Jenkins stood up as all the weapons of the soldiers trained on her. She hung her head in defeat as she realized how they saw her now.

"I'm one of you!" She yelled in her wolfen voice. "Corporal Samantha Jenkins! DOD number two eight five, three eight-"

"Drop the wolf!" One of the soldiers yelled.

POP!

She fell to a knee as a rifle round slammed into her thigh and took her leg out from under her.

"Agh!" She cried. "No I'm-"

POP! PO-POP! PO-PO-PO-POP! A series of rapid bursts of rifle fire reported as they slammed into her repeatedly.

She dropped to the ground in excruciating pain as everything went dim.

"Secure the supers!" A loud, amplified, voice said from the helicopter. "Bring them in!"

"What are you doing?" Asked the construction worker as a pair of soldiers grabbed his wrists and maneuvered them behind him. "She's one of the ones that stopped that thing!" He yelled as they slid a pair of restraints on his wrists.

"Yo! You just killed one of the so-called SUPERS!" The punk yelled as he struggled to get loose from three of the soldiers. He spit at one of them as they grabbed his vest to hold him in place. "She was the freakin' amazon chick."

"That's impossible." Said one of the soldiers. "That was a human not a wolf."

"And I was the fuckin hulk dude!" The punk said. "Minus the green paint and bad CGI but that was me. How do I fuckin look now?"

"Get the fuck out of here." Said the same soldier.

"Dude." The punk said, gesturing at the construction worker with his head. "He was the wizard. I was the hulk. SHE was the amazon. We just like... I don't know, powered down or whatever just now."

The Sergeant leading the securing of the people that were widely being referred to as "Supers" radioed up to the chopper.

"You guys sure these are the ones that did it?" She asked. "That intel good? Cause I can see it with the wizard guy being bob the builder. But.... where'd the other two go?"

"Copy that ground." The helicopter's copilot replied. "Getting confirmation from command. But these are the ones they sent us to retrieve. Them and the big bad wolf. This is this spot we were dispatched to."

The Sergeant looked down at the wolf as it took ragged breaths and bled onto the pavement.

"Roger." The helicopter spoke up again. "Ground team. Command confirms. Those two AND the wolf are the ones that brought it down. Have your medics try to stabilize the wolf and bring them in too."

The Sergeant looked down at her radio with a bit of confusion.

"DOOOOC!" She yelled to the cluster of soldiers near the massive wolf monster, which had ceased moving. "Get over here!"

"I fuckin told you!" The Punk yelled as they were ushered away towards a waiting SUV. "Bunch o' assholes!"

And for the second time in a matter of hours, as the medic rushed over to her and nervously began attempting to treat her, Samantha Jenkins lingered on the border between life and death. Though this time she didn't have to worry as much, not that she was aware of it.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/z32uy2/wait_is_this_just_gate_267/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (265/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yyuukd/wait_is_this_just_gate_264/)

Writer's note: What? You thought the new guy was ONLY a good guy?

Enjoy.

PS: You should 100% imagine Defiance behaving like Jack Sparrow whenever he bargained for his life. Minus the drunken sea-legs.

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"NOOOO!" Moon cried out as she watched the Champion of Defiance race down the back of HER champion, dragging its rudimentary spear along Dranek's spine and leaving a trail of moon-glowing gore in her wake. The wound struggled to seal itself of the ALSO deity powered injury.

War looked on with a slight grin as he watched the action. Defiance continued to sit in his chair, quietly and reservedly answering questions from the other gods that were present. Life and Death looked on in quiet approval. They had always been fans of those who fought, so they liked this new god.

"How dare you!?!" Moon screamed as she turned round to face the newcomer. The newcomer SHE had helped create, "How dare you interfere in the plans of your elders?"

The other gods looked at her with an array of emotions. But most of them simply cringed at the display of anger. It was unbecoming of one such as them. And so typical of the corporeally-anchored deities.

Defiance, to his credit, looked at her with zero remorse in his face. That face that looked exactly like the summoned hero, scars and all.

"Do I really need to explain why?" He asked. "Also. You are an elder only in terms of time in manifested form. I have existed in all living beings since their first evolution into sentience. And even in a lot of the non sentient beings. Pretty sure that makes me older than worshiping you." He added while sipping from a cup of coffee that manifested in his hand.

Everyone in the room paused, and turned to look down as something unexpected (for most of them anyways) occurred on the world below.

"Two?" War asked curiously. "Nooo... three? That's....." He looked up at Defiance, who was smiling again. "Highly ill advised.... of a god."

"No." Moon said shakily as she realized what was happening. "How?"

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Jenkins slammed into the wall of, what she was fairly certain was the town's movie theater, like a cannon shot. She landed among a row of poorly cleaned red chairs and realized that it WAS the theater that the beast had slapped her into.

She regained her feet in a heartbeat as she sprung off one of the couch style chairs and back into the air through the hole she'd made in the wall. Her simple spear reappeared in her hand as if by magic as she flew at the monster.

Shit. She thought as she saw it open its mouth to catch her. *Misjudged that one.*

Then, just as she passed the crumbling wall of the theater, someone beat her to the monster.

A torrent of bright white lightning slammed into the side of the creatures face and blackened fur and flesh where it impacted. She used the distraction to slam into the side of its snout with her spear extended, stabbing it just under its eye as it reeled from the first attack.

As she mauled the wolf monster's face with repeated stabs of her spear and slams of her shield she looked over and saw a young dark skinned man standing on a nearby roof top. He was wearing a set of armor that looked like something out of a gladiator movie, and in his hand was a wooden staff that she thought would have looked right in the hands of an old wizard. The staff blasted lightning at the wolf like a thunderstorm on overdrive.

His heart glowed just like hers did, she could see the fire like glow even through the bronze colored breastplate he wore.

Then, as the beast attempted to recover and bite at her legs, which were admittedly practically in its mouth to begin with, something impacted it. She felt the tremor of the impact even from where she was scrambling to get away from its snapping silver teeth.

"BAD DOGGIE!" Someone yelled in a voice that was way way louder than it had any right to be. The wolf reeled from the impact as its eyes widened in surprise. **"YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO DESTROY A TOWN!"**

Suddenly Jenkins felt herself teetering sideways as the wolf monster was knocked over on its side. Even the armored wizard person stopped attacking from their rooftop perch as she felt everything shift and move. Then the wolf began to topple. It whimpered in a way that was oddly heartbreaking despite its monstrous appearance.

Jenkins leapt away from it in a blur.

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"New...." Defiance began as it sipped from the mug of coffee again. "Status Quo."

The other gods bristled at the sound of the words. Moon practically deflated as she watched her Champion begin getting systematically beaten down in front of every camera in the town.

She'd have to come up with new plans. There were still wolves on the field. But she could feel her powers fading as fear of the wolf succumbed to low levels of idolization for the champions of this new god.

She wondered how Defiance would spin their inevitable deaths after his powers exhausted themselves and burned the champions out.

"First and foremost." Defiance said. Then he said something that made her wonder if maybe He'd read her mind. "MYYYY champions don't die from my gifts." The other gods began to murmur. War was looking at Defiance with a combination of anger and curiosity at the concept. "After all, by their very nature my gifts are... for lack of a better term.... given non-consensually." He scrunched his face in mock disgust as he said it.

This caused a commotion amongst the gods, several of them even cried out in protest. Defiance waited patiently, hand held up calling for a silence.

"After all!" He began, bringing their attention back. "Defying me is the best way for them to align WITH me." He bowed his head. "So my powers shall not kill them. Though, they also will not be permanent either. And the odds of a person ever gaining them a second time are all but impossible." He shrugged. "Of course, impossible is also kind of in my wheelhouse as well. So, take that with a grain of salt."

"What is your purpose!?!" A god further back, Winter to be precise, asked.

"Good." Defiance said. "Someone's asking the right questions." He stood up and placed a hand on War's shoulder. "I'm here to broker peace even when there seems to be no alternative to blood." He said, causing War to grow angry. "But also to incite violence solely because I cannot stand the silence treaties." This made War's face shift to a confused smile.

Defiance walked toward Moon.

"I am here for the people most of you use as game pieces. Both for the ones that resist. But also for the ones that resist them= resistors. Zealots and Atheists alike defy each other even when they don't mean to."

He stood next to Moon where she was looking down at the world below. He held his hand out and moon saw that the hand was coated in fur and clawed. She looked at him with apprehensive anger.

"And I am here so that wolves may evade the wolf hunters even when the hunters have laid their traps perfectly." Defiance said as it gestured for the Moon to take the hand.

"Because my champion only became such to strike back at the Earth people." She said as she realized his meaning.

Defiance smiled as the Moon took his hand, and he kissed it gently.

"Because I am on all sides of the equation." Defiance said as it released the hand and began walking away. "I am the wrench. Throw me into your engines and I will break them. But you will also need that wrench to FIX said engine."

It sat back down on its chair once more, this time conjuring an apple that was slightly too red and biting into it.

"And I exist in each of YOU as well." He said as he chewed the nonexistent fruit.

Death and Life took up places next to it in their typical silence as the room broke out into a completely different type of uproar.

"Now if you don't mind." Defiance said. "I have places to be for a bit. I'll be back shortly."

And before any of the other gods could react, the three of them disappeared in a shimmer of green energy.

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Margaret Choi approached the door in a haunted silence.

She'd been directed to the door by several of the castle staff who'd seen where her son and his teacher had gone, and she'd been here once before with the King.

She feared what she might find on the other side.

But she knew that her son was in there, and that was all she needed to know to continue.

"Mrs. Choi." The door said in its odd, echoing voice causing her to jump in surprise. She'd forgotten that it could speak. "Please come in immediately." It said as it withdrew into the wall.

She moved forward with only a split second of hesitation.

"Joseph!" She exclaimed as she saw, and rushed toward, her son.

"Sssssh!" Said a familiar voice. "He's sleeping. Please come in." Veliry said from where she was sat next to her son's unconscious form.

She'd laid him out on a couch that looked to be made of three different types of seat merged together, likely through magic of course. He had a blanket over most of his body, and a headband with a small circle of bluish stone on his forehead. It pulsed with the occasional bit of light every few seconds.

Veliry was gently dabbing at his hands with a series of washcloths that cleaned and rang themselves out whenever she placed one in a bowl of hot water.

Then she saw that his hands were bloody and cut to ribbons. He also had bruises and black veins formed around his hands and wrists.

"I've gotten most of the debris out." Veliry said as she removed a small metal shard from the base of Joey's left thumb. "I'll be able to heal him once I've got them cleaned up." She added as she absently wiped tears away from her cheek with a sleeve that was scorched and bloody.

Margaret took the young mage's hands in her own and held them still.

"Let me." She said. "I do this for a living. Besides, you look like you could use some healing yourself." She said as she took one of the clean washcloths and dabbed at the mage's cheek rubbing away soot and sand and tears.

"He wasn't supposed to be there." Veliry said as she let herself be cleaned. "He was supposed to stay here in the castle. I didn't even realize he was there until he caught me."

"He caught you?" Mrs. Choi asked in surprise. "Caught you how? What do you mean?"

Veliry took a deep shuddering breath. "I was.... I was trying to shield everyone. From some kind of bomb." She shook a few times and Margaret had to brace her shoulders as she threatened to fall over. "And then one of them... One of the Earth soldiers shot me."

The little mage gestured at a hole in the front of her robes and she saw a knot of scarred flesh underneath the bloody, slightly oval hole. She looked around the back of the robe and saw a neat little dime sized hole there, on the opposite side of the mage's body.

"How did you survive this?" She asked in mild amazement as she imagined the injury that could have caused such a wound, and also how it had already scarred.

Veliry absently held up a hand, and on it appeared a ring that seemed to be covered in stripes of light and dark orange fur. In the middle of it was a cat's eye. The eye was almost completely closed.

"What is that? The ring of nine lives?" She asked as she finally got the left cheek of the small mage cleaned up enough to be presentable. The skin underneath the grime was still red and raw though, as if sunburned.

"Cats have five lives." Veliry said weakly. "But yeah."

Margaret pressed the washcloth into Veliry's other hand, ignoring the odd statement. "I've got the first half done. Get the other while I take care of Joey." She said as she turned her focus over to her son, who still slept beside them.

"He tried to protect me." Veliry said in a soft voice. "And I think I just made him more scared."

Margaret smiled just a bit as she looked at the mangled mess that was Joey's palm. It looked like he'd slapped a bunch of razor blades.

"He gets that from..." She chuckled. "Well.... everyone in his family really." Using a pair of odd, brass, tweezers that were set nearby she gingerly plucked a piece of something that looked like a circuit board from her son's hand. "His father was a bit fan of old super hero movies.

Plus I'm a nurse, and James was trying to be a nurse. You know before he got brought here. We all taught him to protect the people around him." She glanced at the mage, who was staring down at her own feet as she wiped some grime off her other cheek meekly. "Especially people he cares about." She added quietly.

"But I was supposed to be protecting him." Veliry countered as she looked at the dirty rag. "That's why I told him to stay here."

"Yes." Margaret agreed. "And somehow, with some magic door or something, he ignored that. I'll have to attempt to ground him later for it." She said with another light chuckle. Then she winced as she pulled on something in his hand and ended up pulling out almost an inch of what looked like wire.

The two of them sat in relative silence as Veliry continued to softly sob and Margaret quietly cleaned her son's hands.

"James told me what happened after." She said a few minutes later, after the small mage's crying had lessened. "He told me how you helped Joseph calm down. Gave him something to focus on."

Veliry just nodded.

"I assume that headband is helping keep him calm?" She asked as she wrapped a piece of gauze around Joey's left pointer finger.

"It restrains his magic. Keeps his mind from focusing it or building it up." Veliry said as she wiped her nose a bit. She placed the wash cloth in the basin of water and Margaret marveled at how it animated itself to clean off. "Don't worry." She said in a slowly fading voice. "Only effect it'll have on him is that his dreams might be a bit fragmented while he's sleeping."

Margaret heard a slight thump, and looked over to see the mage slumped over sideways with her head resting on the armrest of the couch that Joey was lying on. She checked the mage's pulse, making sure that the gunshot wound hadn't killed the small woman without either of them realizing it, magic ring or not. She smirked a bit as she felt the pulse there, a touch weak, but steady.

She sighed as she rested her hand on her son's head, just above the magical band, and rubbed some sand out of his hair. He unconsciously moved his head a bit and let out a grunt.

"You boys sure know how to pick em." She said before moving back down to his hand. "Knights in shining armor and twenty nineteen Corollas. Trying to save damsels in distress only for them to have to turn around and save you." She sighed again as the joke reminded her of how she'd met her husband. She'd ended up driving him to the hospital in his own car. "Just like your father."

She went back to cleaning her son's hand as she called out.

"Door? Can you.... communicate throughout the castle?" She asked uncertainly.

"I can." The door replied in its odd way.

"Can you send for some of the healers please? I think these two are worse off than they'd admit."

"Atypical. But yes." The door replied.

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James "woke up" to a familiar sight. And immediately upon seeing it, realized that he wasn't exactly awake. Not really.

"Hello James." Said a voice that wasn't quite right.

He looked over and saw.... himself. And not like the previous time when it had been an older, more rugged looking version of himself. Nor was there a happy-go-lucky version of himself, or a twisted evil version either.

Instead it was just him, sitting in a comfortable looking arm chair and snacking on an apple.

"Which one of me are you this time?" He asked hesitantly. "Ghost of Christmas.... what..... apple eater or something?" Not his best joke. But he'd had a long day.

The Him looked down at itself.

"Oh!" It said. "That's right. My bad. Forgot to change out for this." It looked at him with a wry grin. "I am new to it after all."

Before James's very eyes the being shimmered and took on the appearance of a samurai warrior, holding a spear that seemed to end in a katana, and pierced by dozens of arrows. His armor was coated in a thick layer of blood.

James looked him over in confusion. "Are you?" He began. "Isn't that guy some kind of Japanese legend or something?" He asked. "What the hell's going on?"

"Yes this is the form of Benkei." The entity said. "Legendary guy. But that's not important. You and I need to have a bit of a talk."

James backed away a bit.

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"Not much of a religious guy." James replied uncertainly. "Much to my Grandma's disdain."

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James blinked rapidly for a few seconds.

"I'm sorry." He said finally. "You're.... a fan of mine?"

"Oh of course." It replied.

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"I'm the god of Defiance." It said as it pressed James down into a red, incredibly comfortable, chair that hadn't been there a few moments before. "Let's discuss the way things work now that I exist."

James shrugged out of its guiding hands and stood back up.

"Oh." The samurai shaped god gasped. "Fantastic."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z29bnv/wait_is_this_just_gate_266/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (265/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yyut6o/wait_is_this_just_gate_264/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: What? You thought the new guy was ONLY a good guy?

Enjoy.

PS: You should 100% imagine Defiance behaving like Jack Sparrow whenever he bargained for his life. Minus the drunken sea-legs.

\~

"NOOOO!" Moon cried out as she watched the Champion of Defiance race down the back of HER champion, dragging its rudimentary spear along Dranek's spine and leaving a trail of moon-glowing gore in her wake. The wound struggled to seal itself of the ALSO deity powered injury.

War looked on with a slight grin as he watched the action. Defiance continued to sit in his chair, quietly and reservedly answering questions from the other gods that were present. Life and Death looked on in quiet approval. They had always been fans of those who fought, so they liked this new god.

"How dare you!?!" Moon screamed as she turned round to face the newcomer. The newcomer SHE had helped create, "How dare you interfere in the plans of your elders?"

The other gods looked at her with an array of emotions. But most of them simply cringed at the display of anger. It was unbecoming of one such as them. And so typical of the corporeally-anchored deities.

Defiance, to his credit, looked at her with zero remorse in his face. That face that looked exactly like the summoned hero, scars and all.

"Do I really need to explain why?" He asked. "Also. You are an elder only in terms of time in manifested form. I have existed in all living beings since their first evolution into sentience. And even in a lot of the non sentient beings. Pretty sure that makes me older than worshiping you." He added while sipping from a cup of coffee that manifested in his hand.

Everyone in the room paused, and turned to look down as something unexpected (for most of them anyways) occurred on the world below.

"Two?" War asked curiously. "Nooo... three? That's....." He looked up at Defiance, who was smiling again. "Highly ill advised.... of a god."

"No." Moon said shakily as she realized what was happening. "How?"

\-------------------------

Jenkins slammed into the wall of, what she was fairly certain was the town's movie theater, like a cannon shot. She landed among a row of poorly cleaned red chairs and realized that it WAS the theater that the beast had slapped her into.

She regained her feet in a heartbeat as she sprung off one of the couch style chairs and back into the air through the hole she'd made in the wall. Her simple spear reappeared in her hand as if by magic as she flew at the monster.

Shit. She thought as she saw it open its mouth to catch her. *Misjudged that one.*

Then, just as she passed the crumbling wall of the theater, someone beat her to the monster.

A torrent of bright white lightning slammed into the side of the creatures face and blackened fur and flesh where it impacted. She used the distraction to slam into the side of its snout with her spear extended, stabbing it just under its eye as it reeled from the first attack.

As she mauled the wolf monster's face with repeated stabs of her spear and slams of her shield she looked over and saw a young dark skinned man standing on a nearby roof top. He was wearing a set of armor that looked like something out of a gladiator movie, and in his hand was a wooden staff that she thought would have looked right in the hands of an old wizard. The staff blasted lightning at the wolf like a thunderstorm on overdrive.

His heart glowed just like hers did, she could see the fire like glow even through the bronze colored breastplate he wore.

Then, as the beast attempted to recover and bite at her legs, which were admittedly practically in its mouth to begin with, something impacted it. She felt the tremor of the impact even from where she was scrambling to get away from its snapping silver teeth.

"BAD DOGGIE!" Someone yelled in a voice that was way way louder than it had any right to be. The wolf reeled from the impact as its eyes widened in surprise. **"YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO DESTROY A TOWN!"**

Suddenly Jenkins felt herself teetering sideways as the wolf monster was knocked over on its side. Even the armored wizard person stopped attacking from their rooftop perch as she felt everything shift and move. Then the wolf began to topple. It whimpered in a way that was oddly heartbreaking despite its monstrous appearance.

Jenkins leapt away from it in a blur.

\------------------------------

"New...." Defiance began as it sipped from the mug of coffee again. "Status Quo."

The other gods bristled at the sound of the words. Moon practically deflated as she watched her Champion begin getting systematically beaten down in front of every camera in the town.

She'd have to come up with new plans. There were still wolves on the field. But she could feel her powers fading as fear of the wolf succumbed to low levels of idolization for the champions of this new god.

She wondered how Defiance would spin their inevitable deaths after his powers exhausted themselves and burned the champions out.

"First and foremost." Defiance said. Then he said something that made her wonder if maybe He'd read her mind. "MYYYY champions don't die from my gifts." The other gods began to murmur. War was looking at Defiance with a combination of anger and curiosity at the concept. "After all, by their very nature my gifts are... for lack of a better term.... given non-consensually." He scrunched his face in mock disgust as he said it.

This caused a commotion amongst the gods, several of them even cried out in protest. Defiance waited patiently, hand held up calling for a silence.

"After all!" He began, bringing their attention back. "Defying me is the best way for them to align WITH me." He bowed his head. "So my powers shall not kill them. Though, they also will not be permanent either. And the odds of a person ever gaining them a second time are all but impossible." He shrugged. "Of course, impossible is also kind of in my wheelhouse as well. So, take that with a grain of salt."

"What is your purpose!?!" A god further back, Winter to be precise, asked.

"Good." Defiance said. "Someone's asking the right questions." He stood up and placed a hand on War's shoulder. "I'm here to broker peace even when there seems to be no alternative to blood." He said, causing War to grow angry. "But also to incite violence solely because I cannot stand the silence treaties." This made War's face shift to a confused smile.

Defiance walked toward Moon.

"I am here for the people most of you use as game pieces. Both for the ones that resist. But also for the ones that resist them. Zealots and Atheists alike defy each other even when they don't mean to."

He stood next to Moon where she was looking down at the world below. He held his hand out and moon saw that the hand was coated in fur and clawed. She looked at him with apprehensive anger.

"And I am here so that wolves may evade the wolf hunters even when the hunters have laid their traps perfectly." Defiance said as it gestured for the Moon to take the hand.

"Because my champion only became such to strike back at the Earth people." She said as she realized his meaning.

Defiance smiled as the Moon took his hand, and he kissed it gently.

"Because I am on all sides of the equation." Defiance said as it released the hand and began walking away. "I am the wrench. Throw me into your engines and I will break them. But you will also need that wrench to FIX said engine."

It sat back down on its chair once more, this time conjuring an apple that was slightly too red and biting into it.

"And I exist in each of YOU as well." He said as he chewed the nonexistent fruit.

Death and Life took up places next to it in their typical silence as the room broke out into a completely different type of uproar.

"Now if you don't mind." Defiance said. "I have places to be for a bit. I'll be back shortly."

And before any of the other gods could react, the three of them disappeared in a shimmer of green energy.

\---

Margaret Choi approached the door in a haunted silence.

She'd been directed to the door by several of the castle staff who'd seen where her son and his teacher had gone, and she'd been here once before with the King.

She feared what she might find on the other side.

But she knew that her son was in there, and that was all she needed to know to continue.

"Mrs. Choi." The door said in its odd, echoing voice causing her to jump in surprise. She'd forgotten that it could speak. "Please come in immediately." It said as it withdrew into the wall.

She moved forward with only a split second of hesitation.

"Joseph!" She exclaimed as she saw, and rushed toward, her son.

"Sssssh!" Said a familiar voice. "He's sleeping. Please come in." Veliry said from where she was sat next to her son's unconscious form.

She'd laid him out on a couch that looked to be made of three different types of seat merged together, likely through magic of course. He had a blanket over most of his body, and a headband with a small circle of bluish stone on his forehead. It pulsed with the occasional bit of light every few seconds.

Veliry was gently dabbing at his hands with a series of washcloths that cleaned and rang themselves out whenever she placed one in a bowl of hot water.

Then she saw that his hands were bloody and cut to ribbons. He also had bruises and black veins formed around his hands and wrists.

"I've gotten most of the debris out." Veliry said as she removed a small metal shard from the base of Joey's left thumb. "I'll be able to heal him once I've got them cleaned up." She added as she absently wiped tears away from her cheek with a sleeve that was scorched and bloody.

Margaret took the young mage's hands in her own and held them still.

"Let me." She said. "I do this for a living. Besides, you look like you could use some healing yourself." She said as she took one of the clean washcloths and dabbed at the mage's cheek rubbing away soot and sand and tears.

"He wasn't supposed to be there." Veliry said as she let herself be cleaned. "He was supposed to stay here in the castle. I didn't even realize he was there until he caught me."

"He caught you?" Mrs. Choi asked in surprise. "Caught you how? What do you mean?"

Veliry took a deep shuddering breath. "I was.... I was trying to shield everyone. From some kind of bomb." She shook a few times and Margaret had to brace her shoulders as she threatened to fall over. "And then one of them... One of the Earth soldiers shot me."

The little mage gestured at a hole in the front of her robes and she saw a knot of scarred flesh underneath the bloody, slightly oval hole. She looked around the back of the robe and saw a neat little dime sized hole there, on the opposite side of the mage's body.

"How did you survive this?" She asked in mild amazement as she imagined the injury that could have caused such a wound, and also how it had already scarred.

Veliry absently held up a hand, and on it appeared a ring that seemed to be covered in stripes of light and dark orange fur. In the middle of it was a cat's eye. The eye was almost completely closed.

"What is that? The ring of nine lives?" She asked as she finally got the left cheek of the small mage cleaned up enough to be presentable. The skin underneath the grime was still red and raw though, as if sunburned.

"Cats have five lives." Veliry said weakly. "But yeah."

Margaret pressed the washcloth into Veliry's other hand, ignoring the odd statement. "I've got the first half done. Get the other while I take care of Joey." She said as she turned her focus over to her son, who still slept beside them.

"He tried to protect me." Veliry said in a soft voice. "And I think I just made him more scared."

Margaret smiled just a bit as she looked at the mangled mess that was Joey's palm. It looked like he'd slapped a bunch of razor blades.

"He gets that from..." She chuckled. "Well.... everyone in his family really." Using a pair of odd, brass, tweezers that were set nearby she gingerly plucked a piece of something that looked like a circuit board from her son's hand. "His father was a big fan of old super hero movies. Plus I'm a nurse, and James was trying to be a nurse. You know before he got brought here. We all taught him to protect the people around him." She glanced at the mage, who was staring down at her own feet as she wiped some grime off her other cheek meekly. "Especially people he cares about." She added quietly.

"But I was supposed to be protecting him." Veliry countered as she looked at the dirty rag. "That's why I told him to stay here."

"Yes." Margaret agreed. "And somehow, with some magic door or something, he ignored that. I'll have to attempt to ground him later for it." She said with another light chuckle. Then she winced as she pulled on something in his hand and ended up pulling out almost an inch of what looked like wire.

The two of them sat in relative silence as Veliry continued to softly sob and Margaret quietly cleaned her son's hands.

"James told me what happened after." She said a few minutes later, after the small mage's crying had lessened. "He told me how you helped Joseph calm down. Gave him something to focus on."

Veliry just nodded.

"I assume that headband is helping keep him calm?" She asked as she wrapped a piece of gauze around Joey's left pointer finger.

"It restrains his magic. Keeps his mind from focusing it or building it up." Veliry said as she wiped her nose a bit. She placed the wash cloth in the basin of water and Margaret marveled at how it animated itself to clean off. "Don't worry." She said in a slowly fading voice. "Only effect it'll have on him is that his dreams might be a bit fragmented while he's sleeping."

Margaret heard a slight thump, and looked over to see the mage slumped over sideways with her head resting on the armrest of the couch that Joey was lying on. She checked the mage's pulse, making sure that the gunshot wound hadn't killed the small woman without either of them realizing it, magic ring or not. She smirked a bit as she felt the pulse there, a touch weak, but steady.

She sighed as she rested her hand on her son's head, just above the magical band, and rubbed some sand out of his hair. He unconsciously moved his head a bit and let out a grunt.

"You boys sure know how to pick em." She said before moving back down to his hand. "Knights in shining armor and twenty nineteen Corollas. Trying

to save damsels in distress only for them to have to turn around and save you." She sighed again as the joke reminded her of how she'd met her husband. She'd ended up driving him to the hospital in his own car. "Just like your father."

She went back to cleaning her son's hand as she called out.

"Door? Can you.... communicate throughout the castle?" She asked uncertainly.

"I can." The door replied in its odd way.

"Can you send for some of the healers please? I think these two are worse off than they'd admit."

"Atypical. But yes." The door replied.

\----------

James "woke up" to a familiar sight. And immediately upon seeing it, realized that he wasn't exactly awake. Not really.

"Hello James." Said a voice that wasn't quite right.

He looked over and saw.... himself. And not like the previous time when it had been an older, more rugged looking version of himself. Nor was there a happy-go-lucky version of himself, or a twisted evil version either.

Instead it was just him, sitting in a comfortable looking arm chair and snacking on an apple.

"Which one of me are you this time?" He asked hesitantly. "Ghost of Christmas.... what..... apple eater or something?" Not his best joke. But he'd had a long day.

The Him looked down at itself.

"Oh!" It said. "That's right. My bad. Forgot to change out for this." It looked at him with a wry grin. "I am new to it after all."

Before James's very eyes the being shimmered and took on the appearance of a samurai warrior, holding a spear that seemed to end in a katana, and pierced by dozens of arrows. His armor was coated in a thick layer of blood.

James looked him over in confusion. "Are you?" He began. "Isn't that guy some kind of Japanese legend or something?" He asked. "What the hell's going on?"

"Yes this is the form of Benkei." The entity said. "Legendary guy. But that's not important. You and I need to have a bit of a talk."

James backed away a bit.

"I knew..." He shrugged and see-sawed his hand. "A guy that could change his shape and had a lot of tricks. Ran with a group of people that could get into your head." James said as he used his hand to subtly check for a pistol. "Kinda shot him in the face."

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"Not much of a religious guy." James replied uncertainly. "Much to my Grandma's disdain."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (264/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yy6dut/wait_is_this_just_gate_263/)

Writer's note: Hey look, unintended consequences. Ouch.

Also Moon fucked around. Now she gets to see the other part.

Godly interview next chapter. Yaaaaaay.

Enjoy.

\~

Kai approached the king's studies on uneasy feet.

He still ached from his injuries. But he was also just tired. That and the fact that he, on principal, didn't bring his spiders with him into the castle had resulted in him quickly exhausting himself as he made his way through the halls. But he needed to speak with the king.

"Guardian of the deep dark Shil'Varyon'Kai. Also known as the Weaver." He said to the guards at the door. He saw them through the eyes of the single purple reaver spider that was perched on his shoulder. It was the ONLY way he would see things now. "Here to discuss a grave matter with his Majesty."

The guards nodded and one of them quietly slipped through the door and into the chamber beyond.

A few moments later the doors opened and Kai heard the King's familiar voice from within.

"Come in." It said simply.

Kai did as he was bid and gave a slight bow to King Farrick, who returned the gesture awkwardly. The king looked, to Kai at least, as though he was nearly as exhausted as he was.

"Your majesty." Kai said in greeting.

"It has been a long time since last we parleyed Guardian." The king replied. "I see that the reports of your injuries are true. Please, come sit. I'll send for a healer." He said as he quickly made his way around his desk to pull up a chair.

"Leave the healers for those who are worse off." Kai said with a pained smile as he gingerly sat down. "I will live. I will simply do so in discomfort. Though I do appreciate the offer."

King Farrick nodded. "I understand we have you to thank for a large part of our victory." He said. "Whatever that victory is worth now."

"Not as great as the princess's leadership. Or this Chief Vickers character, who helped me disable the weapons that both he AND James Choi determined as the greatest threats." Kai said humbly. "I actually missed most of the fight once I.... sustained my injuries. I mostly just helped secure prisoners."

"Still." The king countered. "An important task. And not one typically required of your duties. I thank you."

Kai nodded. "We do have a slight problem though." He said.

The King's eyebrow raised. "Only one?" He asked sarcastically. "What a nice change."

"The Agency intervened." Kai said flatly.

That caught King Farrick's attention. His eyes grew cold and hard.

"They.... removed... one of the prisoners from under our nose. Most likely the second in command of the enemy unit. And also one of their foremost warriors according to the Captain and Chief." Kai said.

"How did they do that?" The King asked.

"They opened one of their doors. A temporary one at that. And they fell through it while under the hold of my spiders. I only knew about it once the battle was winding down and I had reason to look at the area my spiders were going crazy about."

"And you are certain it was THEM?" The king asked. Not accusing. Simply asking for certainty.

"The evidence they left behind points toward them. And they are the only other people who can so easily move about the deep dark without being noticed by the Twelve Guardians."

The king sat in silence for several long moments as he considered this.

"Leave it to them to interfere in such an important event." He said at last. "Tell me what you know."

Kai nodded. Then he began to recount his experience leading up to the battle.

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Jenkins stood up quickly as she felt the wolf beneath her finally go limp.

The ground rumbled as the massive wolf towering over her brought itself around the top of the half burned down building nearby. Its massive

glowing eyes regarded her with that same intensity that she had seen in the corridor of the base. Back.... before.... she'd been turned into whatever she was now.

The massive beast began to emit a growl that made every bone in her body vibrate and made her ears ache.

Every instinct her newly reforged mind had in it told her to cower and submit to the massive creature.

An answer would be prudent. The new voice said inside her mind.

You and the other one that talked to me earlier have a real Greek Pantheon sense about you. She answered. *Using us mortals as playthings and entertainment. How do I know you won't screw me over later?*

She sensed that very amusement that she had in mind from the so called deity.

The beast stomped into a position that had it in line with the small street she was on. Its eyes remained locked on her even as a fighter jet of some kind hit it with a burst of cannon fire.

It didn't even flinch at the attack.

On the first mark you are quite correct. At least for most of my kind. The voice said.***Though I gain no true amusement from any of this. I simply enjoy your tenacity. And "Screwing you" is anathema to my purpose.***

What the fuck is Anathema? She asked.

Nevermind that. It replied. ***In a moment that beast will lunge. Do you desire the strength to counter it?***

Course I do. She answered even as she back pedaled and bumped into a car. Something impacted a different car nearby and she saw another werewolf crouched on it and looking at her with hungry eyes. *But I won't be your toy. Keep your damn power. If I die here, I do so as myself.*

She sensed that same amusement from earlier in their "conversation."

The best kind of answer. So be it. It said. Something burned inside of her, but in a way that seemed almost..... soothing. ***Good luck.... Champion.***

Jenkins' eyes widened as she felt herself shrink down several inches. Her senses of smell and hearing dulled and as she looked down she didn't see fur, or claws, and the window on the car next to her didn't show a wolf anymore.

Instead she saw herself, naked as the day she was born, and emitting a radiance like the glow of a campfire from her eyes and several parts of

her skin. Most noticeably from a spot in her chest that pulsed and throbbed.

"What the fuck?" She asked herself as a simple wooden spear appeared in her right hand, and a metal shield in the other. She looked down in surprise as glowing versions of her combat uniform, plate carrier and all, appeared on her body.

The werewolf, and a new companion that had joined it as she'd changed, looked at her with confusion. She looked to the monstrous wolf nearby and saw the same confusion on its gargantuan face as well.

She reached over and gripped at the door frame of the car and flexed her hand.

The metal creaked and groaned as she made it buckle with little more effort than she would have needed to crack an egg.

"Ohhhh shit." She said softly.

Then she looked up at the wolves nearby. One of them snarled at her as it sensed her anger.

She made to run towards it and closed the distance faster than she could blink.

Before any of them, herself included, could react her spear was impaling the wolf through the chest.

NNNNOOO! That original, feminine, voice raged in her head.
DEFIANCE! It bellowed.

Fuck you. She thought back at it as she slammed the edge of her shield into the wolf's confused and scared face. It flew back from the impact like a missile, leaving gore on her spear that burned away as if the spear was red hot. And for all she knew it was.

She looked over at the other wolf and it cringed back, its ears pressed flat to its head.

There was a loud boom as one of the monster's paws landed next to her. She looked up into its slavering jaws as it made to bite at her.

She jumped to the side and then staggered as she slammed into a brick wall hard enough to send some of its bricks tumbling inside the building it was a part of. Her shield rang like a gong from the impact.

The wolf monster bit down on the car that she and the first wolf had been standing on when she'd impaled it. The car crunched as it crushed it. Then the creature's eye, the one on her side of its body, looked at her with confusion once more. It released the car and turned to face her.

"Ohohohoho!..." She said with a manic grin. "Not a fan of the lack of consent 'OTHER god'." She said with a hint of scorn. "But if this kind of power comes from being your champion then hot damn. I'mma fuck this oversized bitch up!"

She and the monster charged at each other at the same time. The monster moved with the speed of any normal sized wolf made large. But she moved with the speed of some kind of comic book hero.

And as the rest of the military in the area fought to hold back the pack of hungry wolves, or to save the victims of their rampage. Two titans, two godly champions, clashed.

\------------------------

James struggled feebly against the restraining hands of the two healers that were attending him, and his own mother.

"James stay down." His mother demanded.

"Captain Choi please rest. We still need to heal you." Said an elderly dwarf woman. "Your injuries are extensive."

"No!" James countered. "I need to see Joey! I need to make sure he's okay! Let go of me!"

"We can't do that." The Minotaur said. "I've already sent out several of my staff to see if he's among the injured. But you need to rest now Mr. Choi. I won't have you injure yourself further. Not under my watch!"

"He needs me." James insisted. "Mom he was having an episode. He got scared and he did something that's going to make it hard for him to come back down. We have to help him."

"JAMES MICHAEL CHOI!" His mother said in that tone that instantly made him flinch and draw back a bit. "YOU WILL SIT YOUR ASS BACK ON THIS BED AND LET THEM HEAL YOU OR ELSE I WILL MAKE THEIR JOBS HARDER! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

James fought the urge to listen and obey. But he couldn't, not right now.

"No mom." He said simply. "I have to see Joey. I can't stay here."

Then something unexpected happened. Even more unexpected than seeing his mom here in the first place.

His mother's eyes and hands began to glow. The light coming off of them was the familiar amber glow of healing. But James's magical senses screamed at him that he was in danger.

"I SAID SIT DOWN YOUNG MAN!" She bellowed in a voice that echoed louder than anyone in the room expected. She pressed a hand to his forehead, and before James could react, slapped him across the cheek. Then she pressed him back down onto the medical bed.

"Yes mom." He said eagerly, cowed by the unexpected power and violence his mother had displayed.

She sagged as the power faded from her eyes and hands and the minotaur caught her with a single hand as she slumped.

"Mrs. Choi." He said. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah." She replied as she gripped the edge of the bed and regained her footing. "Yeah. I'm good. Thank you."

She looked James in the eyes and he saw the worry and the lingering anger there. He also saw the hints of black veins around the edges of them.

"When did you figure out magic?" He asked uncertainly.

"Literally today mijo." She said as she took a deep breath. "Damn that took a lot out of me."

"Mom." He said softly. "Joey's in trouble. He's scared. And he's gonna be confused. I HAVE to go talk to him."

She placed a hand over his. He winced as he felt the broken bones there throb from the contact.

"Mijo. I don't know what happened. But your in no place to do anything. Stay and heal." She said. "I'll go find him. Tell me what happened."

James saw the resolve there, and suddenly felt guilty that he hadn't thought SHE could help his brother too.

He told her everything she knew. Even the part where Joey had inadvertently impaled him.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/z1dxci/wait_is_this_just_gate_265/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (264/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yy6bbz/wait_is_this_just_gate_263/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey look, unintended consequences. Ouch.

Also Moon fucked around. Now she gets to see the other part.

Godly interview next chapter. Yaaaaaay.

Enjoy.

\~

Kai approached the king's studies on uneasy feet.

He still ached from his injuries. But he was also just tired. That and the fact that he, on principal, didn't bring his spiders with him into the castle had resulted in him quickly exhausting himself as he made his way through the halls. But he needed to speak with the king.

"Guardian of the deep dark Shil'Varyon'Kai. Also known as the Weaver." He said to the guards at the door. He saw them through the eyes of the single purple reaver spider that was perched on his shoulder. It was the ONLY way he would see things now. "Here to discuss a grave matter with his Majesty."

The guards nodded and one of them quietly slipped through the door and into the chamber beyond.

A few moments later the doors opened and Kai heard the King's familiar voice from within.

"Come in." It said simply.

Kai did as he was bid and gave a slight bow to King Farrick, who returned the gesture awkwardly. The king looked, to Kai at least, as though he was nearly as exhausted as he was.

"Your majesty." Kai said in greeting.

"It has been a long time since last we parleyed Guardian." The king replied. "I see that the reports of your injuries are true. Please, come sit. I'll send for a healer." He said as he quickly made his way around his desk to pull up a chair.

"Leave the healers for those who are worse off." Kai said with a pained smile as he gingerly sat down. "I will live. I will simply do so in discomfort. Though I do appreciate the offer."

King Farrick nodded. "I understand we have you to thank for a large part of our victory." He said. "Whatever that victory is worth now."

"Not as great as the princess's leadership. Or this Chief Vickers character, who helped me disable the weapons that both he AND James Choi determined as the greatest threats." Kai said humbly. "I actually missed most of the fight once I.... sustained my injuries. I mostly just helped secure prisoners."

"Still." The king countered. "An important task. And not one typically required of your duties. I thank you."

Kai nodded. "We do have a slight problem though." He said.

The King's eyebrow raised. "Only one?" He asked sarcastically. "What a nice change."

"The Agency intervened." Kai said flatly.

That caught King Farrick's attention. His eyes grew cold and hard.

"They.... removed... one of the prisoners from under our nose. Most likely the second in command of the enemy unit. And also one of their foremost warriors according to the Captain and Chief." Kai said.

"How did they do that?" The King asked.

"They opened one of their doors. A temporary one at that. And they fell through it while under the hold of my spiders. I only knew about it once the battle was winding down and I had reason to look at the area my spiders were going crazy about."

"And you are certain it was THEM?" The king asked. Not accusing. Simply asking for certainty.

"The evidence they left behind points toward them. And they are the only other people who can so easily move about the deep dark without being noticed by the Twelve Guardians."

The king sat in silence for several long moments as he considered this.

"Leave it to them to interfere in such an important event." He said at last. "Tell me what you know."

Kai nodded. Then he began to recount his experience leading up to the battle.

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Jenkins stood up quickly as she felt the wolf beneath her finally go limp.

The ground rumbled as the massive wolf towering over her brought itself around the top of the half burned down building nearby. Its massive glowing eyes regarded her with that same intensity that she had seen in the corridor of the base. Back.... before.... she'd been turned into whatever she was now.

The massive beast began to emit a growl that made every bone in her body vibrate and made her ears ache.

Every instinct her newly reforged mind had in it told her to cower and submit to the massive creature.

An answer would be prudent. The new voice said inside her mind.

You and the other one that talked to me earlier have a real Greek Pantheon sense about you. She answered. *Using us mortals as playthings and entertainment. How do I know you won't screw me over later?*

She sensed that very amusement that she had in mind from the so called deity.

The beast stomped into a position that had it in line with the small street she was on. Its eyes remained locked on her even as a fighter jet of some kind hit it with a burst of cannon fire.

It didn't even flinch at the attack.

On the first mark you are quite correct. At least for most of my kind. The voice said.***Though I gain no true amusement from any of this. I simply enjoy your tenacity. And "Screwing you" is anathema to my purpose.***

What the fuck is Anathema? She asked.

Nevermind that. It replied. ***In a moment that beast will lunge. Do you desire the strength to counter it?***

Course I do. She answered even as she back pedaled and bumped into a car. Something impacted a different car nearby and she saw another werewolf crouched on it and looking at her with hungry eyes. *But I won't be your toy. Keep your damn power. If I die here, I do so as myself.*

She sensed that same amusement from earlier in their "conversation."

The best kind of answer. So be it. It said. Something burned inside of her, but in a way that seemed almost..... soothing. ***Good luck.... Champion.***

Jenkins' eyes widened as she felt herself shrink down several inches. Her senses of smell and hearing dulled and as she looked down she didn't see fur, or claws, and the window on the car next to her didn't show a wolf anymore.

Instead she saw herself, naked as the day she was born, and emitting a radiance like the glow of a campfire from her eyes and several parts of her skin. Most noticeably from a spot in her chest that pulsed and throbbed.

"What the fuck?" She asked herself as a simple wooden spear appeared in her right hand, and a metal shield in the other. She looked down in surprise as glowing versions of her combat uniform, plate carrier and all, appeared on her body.

The werewolf, and a new companion that had joined it as she'd changed, looked at her with confusion. She looked to the monstrous wolf nearby and saw the same confusion on its gargantuan face as well.

She reached over and gripped at the door frame of the car and flexed her hand.

The metal creaked and groaned as she made it buckle with little more effort than she would have needed to crack an egg.

"Ohhhh shit." She said softly.

Then she looked up at the wolves nearby. One of them snarled at her as it sensed her anger.

She made to run towards it and closed the distance faster than she could blink.

Before any of them, herself included, could react her spear was impaling the wolf through the chest.

NNNNOOO! That original, feminine, voice raged in her head.
DEFIANCE! It bellowed.

Fuck you. She thought back at it as she slammed the edge of her shield into the wolf's confused and scared face. It flew back from the impact like a missile, leaving gore on her spear that burned away as if the spear was red hot. And for all she knew it was.

She looked over at the other wolf and it cringed back, its ears pressed flat to its head.

There was a loud boom as one of the monster's paws landed next to her. She looked up into its slavering jaws as it made to bite at her.

She jumped to the side and then staggered as she slammed into a brick wall hard enough to send some of its bricks tumbling inside the building it was a part of. Her shield rang like a gong from the impact.

The wolf monster bit down on the car that she and the first wolf had been standing on when she'd impaled it. The car crunched as it crushed it. Then the creature's eye, the one on her side of its body, looked at her with confusion once more. It released the car and turned to face her.

"Ohohohoho!..." She said with a manic grin. "Not a fan of the lack of consent 'OTHER god'." She said with a hint of scorn. "But if this kind of power comes from being your champion then hot damn. I'mma fuck this oversized bitch up!"

She and the monster charged at each other at the same time. The monster moved with the speed of any normal sized wolf made large. But she moved with the speed of some kind of comic book hero.

And as the rest of the military in the area fought to hold back the pack of hungry wolves, or to save the victims of their rampage. Two titans, two godly champions, clashed.

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James struggled feebly against the restraining hands of the two healers that were attending him, and his own mother.

"James stay down." His mother demanded.

"Captain Choi please rest. We still need to heal you." Said an elderly dwarf woman. "Your injuries are extensive."

"No!" James countered. "I need to see Joey! I need to make sure he's okay! Let go of me!"

"We can't do that." The Minotaur said. "I've already sent out several of my staff to see if he's among the injured. But you need to rest now Mr. Choi. I won't have you injure yourself further. Not under my watch!"

"He needs me." James insisted. "Mom he was having an episode. He got scared and he did something that's going to make it hard for him to come back down. We have to help him."

"JAMES MICHAEL CHOI!" His mother said in that tone that instantly made him flinch and draw back a bit. "YOU WILL SIT YOUR ASS BACK ON THIS BED AND LET THEM HEAL YOU OR ELSE I WILL MAKE THEIR JOBS HARDER! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

James fought the urge to listen and obey. But he couldn't, not right now.

"No mom." He said simply. "I have to see Joey. I can't stay here."

Then something unexpected happened. Even more unexpected than seeing his mom here in the first place.

His mother's eyes and hands began to glow. The light coming off of them was the familiar amber glow of healing. But James's magical senses screamed at him that he was in danger.

"I SAID SIT DOWN YOUNG MAN!" She bellowed in a voice that echoed louder than anyone in the room expected. She pressed a hand to his forehead, and before James could react, slapped him across the cheek. Then she pressed him back down onto the medical bed.

"Yes mom." He said eagerly, cowed by the unexpected power and violence his mother had displayed.

She sagged as the power faded from her eyes and hands and the minotaur caught her with a single hand as she slumped.

"Mrs. Choi." He said. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah." She replied as she gripped the edge of the bed and regained her footing. "Yeah. I'm good. Thank you."

She looked James in the eyes and he saw the worry and the lingering anger there. He also saw the hints of black veins around the edges of them.

"When did you figure out magic?" He asked uncertainly.

"Literally today mijo." She said as she took a deep breath. "Damn that took a lot out of me."

"Mom." He said softly. "Joey's in trouble. He's scared. And he's gonna be confused. I HAVE to go talk to him."

She placed a hand over his. He winced as he felt the broken bones there throb from the contact.

"Mijo. I don't know what happened. But you're in no place to do anything. Stay and heal." She said. "I'll go find him. Tell me what happened."

James saw the resolve there, and suddenly felt guilty that he hadn't thought SHE could help his brother too.

He told her everything she knew. Even the part where Joey had inadvertently impaled him.

By the time he was done her eyes glistened with barely held back tears.

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She didn't say another word as she left the room.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (263/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yx6zki/wait_is_this_just_gate_262/)

Writer's note: Hey hey, Big reveal. And no, it's not as dumb as some of my past reveals may have led you to believe. A NEW PLAYER ENTERS THE FIELD!

Enjoy.

\~

James couldn't remember waking up.

Had it happened hours ago? Minutes? Weeks or seconds?

Something was odd about the space around him. He had the impression of hiding behind a curtain. But not a good curtain. More like one of those lacy, see through curtains that was more about softening the light than stopping it.

There were people **(?)** on the other side. But something in his mind told him that that wasn't quite right. These weren't REALLY people. He didn't know how he knew that. But somehow he knew it was accurate.

He reached out to push back at the curtain like barrier and found it immovable.

Then he looked down at the hand that had done the pushing.

James recoiled at the left hand.

>!"Where the fuck is my fur and claws?"!< He asked as he looked down at his old human arm. Then he touched his mouth as he realized that he hadn't heard his own voice. >!"What the fuck?"!<

One of the Not-People turned their head(s) to look towards him curiously. He froze in shock as he realized that they must not have known he was there.

Something told him not to let them find him or he would be in trouble.

After a moment of looking his direction, the Not-Person with the indeterminate number of heads turned back to the conversation that he could only half hear.

Then he began to notice the odd nature of the room beyond.

It wasn't a room.

Sure, there was a ceiling. But it seemed to be made of twinkling stars and shifting colors and gases. He had the sense that it was only a few feet above him and that he could touch it despite the veil he was looking through.

He also knew that if he did he would never find his way back **HOME.**

The floor was some kind of silvery metal that looked like it could have been titanium. But when the figures beyond walked, or crawled, or however they moved, he saw the floor ripple like water.

There were no walls that he could see in any direction. He tried to turn around to see if the metaphorical behind-the-curtains space he was in would have a wall that he was pressed against.

But when he did he found himself looking back at the exact same view he had been looking at before turning around. As if he was some game character who had hit the focus button to look back at something important.

More of the Not-People appeared, seemingly from thin air, and James suddenly realized that he was sitting in a miasma of overflowing magical energy. He hadn't noticed it at first. But as the new arrivals appeared each of them brought with them a flood of energy so massive that he felt himself struggling not to be overwhelmed. He imagined that it was the magical sensation equivalent to how Joey might feel at an unexpected Heavy Metal concert.

One of the Not-People drew his attention. Not because of their unfathomable physiology, but rather because as he looked at what he thought was a woman he saw familiarity that couldn't exist given his current situation.

Her skin glowed in a slowly shifting myriad of colors but one color dominated all others. A sort of silvery white light that he KNEW. Not in a learned knowledge kind of way, but in the instinctive "I've known this my whole life" kind of way.

His arm throbbed and burned with the memory of what had happened to it in a completely different world.

"The Moon." He said in a stern yet still silent voice that he was surprised he COULD hear.

And as if he had called her on a bullhorn, her head snapped toward his location and her eyes locked on his.

Before, he had only ever heard the conversations in hushed murmurs and whispers. But as she realized he was there and spoke, he heard her as clearly as if they were standing right next to each other.

"You?" She asked in a voice that was equal parts feminine and boomingly, painfully, loud. ***"How?"***

The other Not-People, who James now realized must have been other so-called GODS, turned to regard him. That feeling that he should have gone unnoticed and hidden made James's blood run cold at the realization as one of them, a large four legged creature with different weapons in each of its three arms, began approaching him.

As it approached he realized that he'd not been looking at people his size. Rather, he'd been looking at them from something akin to a table height, or maybe a shelf. The alien creature, the GOD, approached with blinding speed. And yet as it did it crossed MILES of space.

Before James realized what had happened he was looking up at a figure that was taller than any sky scraper, or mountain, or..... hell, anything he'd ever seen in his life.

He was an ant to this thing. Hell, less than an ant, he was a grain of sand that had somehow managed to get a balcony seat to a cocktail party of Deities.

"HOW ARE YOU HERE?" A male voice that, somehow, sounded like metal impacting metal demanded as the alien form approached.

"James?" A familiar voice said from somewhere far away. "Mijo!"

Something, some phantom force, slapped lightly at his cheek.

"Mijo!?!?" His mom's voice said. "Mijo wake up! Please!"

The curtain space and the view of the veiled gods was instantly replaced by a view of a familiar ceiling, and a world of pain.

James shuddered as he drew a deep, refreshingly cool, breath. He hadn't even realized that he hadn't been breathing in the.... other place.

"James?" His mother asked as she gripped his face.

"Mom?" He asked, confused, as he turned to look at her. His neck ached from the movement.

"Oh thank God!" She exclaimed as she showered him in kisses. James looked up in fear as she said the Deity's name. "We thought we'd lost you. Your breathing stopped." She continued before slapping his left shoulder lightly. It hurt, but the pain was muted compared to what it should have been. He looked and saw the familiar dark fur there. "What happened?"

He quickly used the wolf arm to grab his mom's shoulder and look her in the face. Her cheeks glistened with tears.

"Mom where's Joey?" He asked.

Margaret Choi looked at her son in confusion at the question.

And what the fuck did I just see? He wondered as he looked back at the ceiling.

\--------------------------

Dranek turned his massive form southward, ignoring the attacks of the pathetic humans below him, which were growing fewer and more inaccurate. As he did, his tail swiped one of the odd spinning contraptions out of the air with a painful sting as its blades dug into his flesh, before it spun out of the air and crashed in a fireball.

This felt good in the worst way possible.

For years, decades even, he had longed for a chance to lash out. To strike back at everyone and everything. Why should he have been the capped exile? He had only been defending himself. The only reason he had been tried for an unsanctioned turning and not a murder was because blood loss had made him pass out before he'd been able to rip the fool's head off.

But now as he stomped on one of the odd, metal, carriages with their alien projectile weapons he would have smiled if he could have. It felt good to finally be the one that all the other wolves, and there were many surrounding him now, looked up to. The fact that that was literal only made it better.

One of the massive metal arrows, the ones with the explosive rune stones in them, impacted him just to the side of his snout, sending his hot blood and flesh flying as it exploded. He felt several of his massive, silver, teeth pop and fall out of his mouth and he saw one crush several of the small humans below. Even when he faltered he was a deadly force of nature.

The two teeth grew back, silver and all, in a matter of moments as he reached up and used them to rip a massive green and white metal sign off of its posts and throw it at a group of soldiers below.

Beloved champion Dranek.

Goddess. He thought back. But thinking was getting difficult now. More and more he was finding his thoughts simplified. Attack, eat, move. Little more existed in his mind now. Even thinking her title felt like drawing air while drowning. It felt blissful for things to be so simple now.

We have a slight.... problem... my champion.

How.......help?

Smell for the blood of wolves. She instructed him. ***Smell for the scent of anger and fury, and look for clusters of your kin. They deal with non-believers and blasphemers.***

They.... deny you? Goddess?

They try. She admitted.

Dranek owes Goddess life. Dranek will..... He struggled to find the word even though he'd had it only moments before. *......Serve.*

I know you will my dear. And you shall be so handsomely rewarded for it.

Something, some kind of projectile that moved too fast for him to even sense, slammed into his side, punching through both of his shoulder blades, ribs, and organs, and continued onward without even slowing

down, and sent him toppling over sideways. Dozens of fellow wolves scattered as fast as they could as he crushed buildings and trees and the odd metal carriages. More than a few of them didn't make it and were crushed badly enough that even THEY couldn't survive it.

Dranek will try.

He slowly lifted himself up on forelegs that shook as they regenerated from the startling amount of damage the round had done.

As he stood to full height another projectile of the same nature ripped his throat out, sending a wave of hot, faintly luminous, blood splashing over the remains of a building that his nose told him was some kind of restaurant.

He turned toward the direction the round had come from. Then jumped out of the way just as another round came at him. He almost dodged it, and felt a line of fire blast through his left flank in a long ragged slash.

He saw the hole the projectile had made in the woods near town, smelled the ozone of some kind of magic from where it had passed, though it was unlike anything he'd ever smelled before.

He began to charge toward it, occasionally dodging left or right.

First. This thing dies.

\---

"Ohhhhh. The humans have brought out one of their magnetic cannons." War said in a fit of joy that was atypical of him. "Oh, I do so love some of the weapons this world has come up with. We need to make more of these No-Magic worlds. Very innovative in their bloodshed."

Moon sighed as she looked around the vision space that had just manifested. It wasn't uncommon for the other gods to put one in place when Apotheosis was approaching. Especially now that Logic and Lust had both shown up. They always showed up at the same time, and they constantly bickered. But they loved having Visuals for everything.

"War!" She hissed, pulling the weapon laden god form's attention. "How was that MORTAL here?"

War rolled his eyes, which was impressive given his crustacean-like anatomy, at the question.

"It's apotheosis Moon." He said simply, as if that answered anything at all. "The rules always get a little..... loose.... when a god is born." He went back to the somewhat reclined position he'd been in and looked back upon the world.

"Still. A mortal was here. IN OUR REALM." She reiterated. "And it was HIM. HOW?"

War took in a deep breath.

"Your obsession with hims is adorable Moon. Really. You should make some demi-gods with him. That world hasn't had any of those in a while. Nice change of pace." He said as he smiled. Below them a squad of Soldiers had just opened up with an automatic grenade launcher and were absolutely wreaking havoc on the Moon's children. And most of the nearby buildings too. "But it's not like he's the first one to ever get here."

"Those were all vestiges during prayer rituals." She shot back. "People who requested, and were granted audience. HE wouldn't do that. And you know it."

War simply shrugged with his three shoulders. "Yeah, and he's probably in a coma now. Or will be. Not many mortals have gotten eyes on our true forms and kept their minds intact. Only issue this will cause is if it ruins his story line."

A sudden stillness came over the space as a ***NEW*** voice spoke.

"I... brought him here." Said the new voice. The tone, pitch, and even cadence of the new voice rapidly shifted as it spoke. It's form was humanoid in shape, but all of its features were soft and indistinguishable.

"This is earlier than expected." War said to her in a whisper. "Is it supposed to have happened already?"

"Apologies." It said, as though it had heard the question, and as a god it probably had. "It is simply my way."

Moon tensed even as she saw other gods around the space growing uneasy around the new member of their kind.

"Who..... or WHAT... are you?" Life asked. Life was always the one to ask. It was their role in these things.

The new god looked at life with a soft smile as its form took on one that was similar to a human. But uglier, and hairier, and a little hunched. It was wearing simple animal furs and clutched a rudimentary spear.

"I am the proto-human." It said as it began to pace around and examine each of them. "Half starved, sick with illnesses that no longer exist, surrounded by wolves as they circle him for their dinner. Determined to make them work for their meal."

It looked down at the world below with another of those soft smiles as its form shifted to one of ancient Greek features, wearing tattered, blood soaked bronze armor and wielding a broken spear and a shield covered in dents and embedded arrows.

"I am King Leonidas and the few thousand free Greeks who stood against an army that outnumbered them twenty to one and had them surrounded."

It shifted to the form of a sweaty, dirty, African man with no shirt on and scars across his back. A noose extended from its neck up out of sight.

"I am the slave. Who could no longer accept a master."

Another form shift and it was a skinny, bald, pale woman.

"I am the patient." It said as it neared Death, who smiled at it. Death never smiled at any of them except life. "Whose days can be counted on their fingers. But who will still go to their doctors appointments. To gatherings with friends and families even though it exhausts them. Who continues to attempt survival because what other option is there?"

It became a small child with ratty clothes and a tattered book in one hand.

"I am the child of a destitute family. Who will be lucky to see adulthood. And even though I will need to move heaven and earth to get anywhere, I study harder than any other child my age. Because I know that moving heaven and earth are the only way I will get anywhere or become anything.

It shifted again as it leaned against a pillar that hadn't been there until it had moved to lean. And it was wearing a bloody, soot stained, version of the uniform the soldiers below wore. But with a black and blue polo shirt. It leaned because its left leg now ended in a bloody stump.

"I am PFC Anthony Goodson. Who is, as we speak, about to die. He is still wearing the pizza delivery shirt that he'd been wearing when his Reserve Unit called him into action." It smiled, but the smile was sad this time. "He has five.... no.... four... rounds left in his rifle. His leg is pinned under some debris from the building his squad had been in and he cannot move. And your wolves are closing in on him." It said with an accusatory glance at Moon. "And he will die a bloody, senseless death. But he will do so with an empty magazine and a bloody combat knife."

It shifted again, and now it WAS one of those werewolves. It had the subtle curves that marked it as a woman, and Moon recognized the form.

"I am Corporal Samantha Leray Jenkins. Who thought she was dead. Only to reawaken as something from her nightmares, and begin receiving instructions from a goddess." This time it stared at Moon with that same sad smile. "And even though there is no solid evidence AGAINST this goddess's existence. I have denied her and I fight her forces with literal tooth and nail."

Moon spoke the word that she had had on the tip of her tongue as she had dealt with the handful of Earth humans who had resisted her.

"Defiance." She hissed.

The new god smiled at her and nodded. Its form shifted to that of the very Mortal who had intruded on their space.

"Don't wear it out." Defiance said in a deeper version of James Choi's voice.

Then, as the pantheon exploded into angry accusations and impromptu prophesying, Defiance walked over to a, previously non-existent, chair and sat down.

Moon glared at it as one of the other Gods harried her about how she had brought such a God into apotheosis.

\------------------------------

Jenkins was tired as she faced off against yet another of the werewolves.

Her body bore more wounds than she thought she had ever gotten in the rest of her life.

Still, she fought. The beast lunged at her.

"Serve." It said just as she dodged to the side and slashed her new claws down its side. It whimpered and skittered away as the last of its tattered lab coat fell away from it, coated in its own blood.

"Fuck you!" She yelled in her new, deeper, voice. It hurt to talk. A bullet from one of her own brothers in arms had hit her in the chest a few minutes earlier. She'd lived thanks to her new form. But it still hurt.

The wolf jumped up on a piece of wreckage near it and then leapt into the air with its claws extended toward her. She jumped towards it, clearing at least ten feet before she impacted the beast and the two of them began rolling over and over like the dogs they now resembled.

"I'm not gonna be a monster just because some jumped up wannabe deity made me look like one." She said as she managed to get the beast in a makeshift arm bar. She snapped its arm without hesitation, then as it began to cry got it into a choke hold and began strangling it into unconsciousness.

She'd only managed that tactic on a few of the other wolves she'd faced. The rest she'd had to put down in a messier fashion, and hope that they healed from it.

It took a few minutes. She knew from her own new physiology that the wolf's neck and throat were much larger, and assumed that their hearts were too. So choking them out was time exhaustive.

The ground beneath her shuddered as the massive wolf rampaging on the other side of the town did something.

Gotta stay away from that thing. She thought.

Samantha Jenkins. A voice said to her. But it wasn't the voice that had spoken to her earlier. ***You have a defiant soul.***

Great. She thought. *Which one are you? Jesus? Horus? Maybe some Aztec god or something?*

I am none of the ones you know. It replied. And she got a sense that this speaker was sad somehow. Or maybe tired. ***But I come with an offer. I ask for no service nor devotion. I ask only that you continue to defy those who would control you.***

She felt the werewolf wrapped in her arms and legs begin weakening.

Yeah? And what do I get out of this offer? Or... more importantly... what do YOU get out of it?

You will gain the power to end this battle. And, though you are already one in spirit, I.... will gain a champion.

The ground shuddered again, closer this time. And Jenkins heard some great movement of the wind as it seemed to pulse.

Then a massive, fur laden, slightly glowing, nose moved over the building near her and began to sniff.

Oh shit. She thought as she considered the offer.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yyuukd/wait_is_this_just_gate_264/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (263/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yx6xsu/wait_is_this_just_gate_262/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey hey, Big reveal. And no, it's not as dumb as some of my past reveals may have led you to believe. A NEW PLAYER ENTERS THE FIELD!

Enjoy.

\~

James couldn't remember waking up.

Had it happened hours ago? Minutes? Weeks or seconds?

Something was odd about the space around him. He had the impression of hiding behind a curtain. But not a good curtain. More like one of those

lacy, see through curtains that was more about softening the light than stopping it.

There were people **(?)** on the other side. But something in his mind told him that that wasn't quite right. These weren't REALLY people. He didn't know how he knew that. But somehow he knew it was accurate.

He reached out to push back at the curtain like barrier and found it immovable.

Then he looked down at the hand that had done the pushing.

James recoiled at the left hand.

>!"Where the fuck is my fur and claws?"!< He asked as he looked down at his old human arm. Then he touched his mouth as he realized that he hadn't heard his own voice. >!"What the fuck?"!<

One of the Not-People turned their head(s) to look towards him curiously. He froze in shock as he realized that they must not have known he was there.

Something told him not to let them find him or he would be in trouble.

After a moment of looking his direction, the Not-Person with the indeterminate number of heads turned back to the conversation that he could only half hear.

Then he began to notice the odd nature of the room beyond.

It wasn't a room.

Sure, there was a ceiling. But it seemed to be made of twinkling stars and shifting colors and gases. He had the sense that it was only a few feet above him and that he could touch it despite the veil he was looking through.

He also knew that if he did he would never find his way back **HOME.**

The floor was some kind of silvery metal that looked like it could have been titanium. But when the figures beyond walked, or crawled, or however they moved, he saw the floor ripple like water.

There were no walls that he could see in any direction. He tried to turn around to see if the metaphorical behind-the-curtains space he was in would have a wall that he was pressed against.

But when he did he found himself looking back at the exact same view he had been looking at before turning around. As if he was some game character who had hit the focus button to look back at something important.

More of the Not-People appeared, seemingly from thin air, and James suddenly realized that he was sitting in a miasma of overflowing magical

energy. He hadn't noticed it at first. But as the new arrivals appeared each of them brought with them a flood of energy so massive that he felt himself struggling not to be overwhelmed. He imagined that it was the magical sensation equivalent to how Joey might feel at an unexpected Heavy Metal concert.

One of the Not-People drew his attention. Not because of their unfathomable physiology, but rather because as he looked at what he thought was a woman he saw familiarity that couldn't exist given his current situation.

Her skin glowed in a slowly shifting myriad of colors but one color dominated all others. A sort of silvery white light that he KNEW. Not in a learned knowledge kind of way, but in the instinctive "I've known this my whole life" kind of way.

His arm throbbed and burned with the memory of what had happened to it in a completely different world.

"The Moon." He said in a stern yet still silent voice that he was surprised he COULD hear.

And as if he had called her on a bullhorn, her head snapped toward his location and her eyes locked on his.

Before, he had only ever heard the conversations in hushed murmurs and whispers. But as she realized he was there and spoke, he heard her as clearly as if they were standing right next to each other.

"You?" She asked in a voice that was equal parts feminine and boomingly, painfully, loud. ***"How?"***

The other Not-People, who James now realized must have been other so-called GODS, turned to regard him. That feeling that he should have gone unnoticed and hidden made James's blood run cold at the realization as one of them, a large four legged creature with different weapons in each of its three arms, began approaching him.

As it approached he realized that he'd not been looking at people his size. Rather, he'd been looking at them from something akin to a table height, or maybe a shelf. The alien creature, the GOD, approached with blinding speed. And yet as it did it crossed MILES of space.

Before James realized what had happened he was looking up at a figure that was taller than any sky scraper, or mountain, or..... hell, anything he'd ever seen in his life.

He was an ant to this thing. Hell, less than an ant, he was a grain of sand that had somehow managed to get a balcony seat to a cocktail party of Deities.

"HOW ARE YOU HERE?" A male voice that, somehow, sounded like metal impacting metal demanded as the alien form approached.

^("James?") A familiar voice said from somewhere far away. ^("Mijo!")

Something, some phantom force, slapped lightly at his cheek.

"Mijo!?!?" His mom's voice said. "Mijo wake up! Please!"

The curtain space and the view of the veiled gods was instantly replaced by a view of a familiar ceiling, and a world of pain.

James shuddered as he drew a deep, refreshingly cool, breath. He hadn't even realized that he hadn't been breathing in the.... other place.

"James?" His mother asked as she gripped his face.

"Mom?" He asked, confused, as he turned to look at her. His neck ached from the movement.

"Oh thank God!" She exclaimed as she showered him in kisses. James looked up in fear as she said the Deity's name. "We thought we'd lost you. Your breathing stopped." She continued before slapping his left shoulder lightly. It hurt, but the pain was muted compared to what it should have been. He looked and saw the familiar dark fur there. "What happened?"

He quickly used the wolf arm to grab his mom's shoulder and look her in the face. Her cheeks glistened with tears.

"Mom where's Joey?" He asked.

Margaret Choi looked at her son in confusion at the question.

And what the fuck did I just see? He wondered as he looked back at the ceiling.

\-------------------------

Dranek turned his massive form southward, ignoring the attacks of the pathetic humans below him, which were growing fewer and more inaccurate. As he did, his tail swiped one of the odd spinning contraptions out of the air with a painful sting as its blades dug into his flesh, before it spun out of the air and crashed in a fireball.

This felt good in the worst way possible.

For years, decades even, he had longed for a chance to lash out. To strike back at everyone and everything. Why should he have been the capped exile? He had only been defending himself. The only reason he had been tried for an unsanctioned turning and not a murder was because blood loss had made him pass out before he'd been able to rip the fool's head off.

But now as he stomped on one of the odd, metal, carriages with their alien projectile weapons he would have smiled if he could have. It felt good to finally be the one that all the other wolves, and there were many

surrounding him now, looked up to. The fact that that was literal only made it better.

One of the massive metal arrows, the ones with the explosive rune stones in them, impacted him just to the side of his snout, sending his hot blood and flesh flying as it exploded. He felt several of his massive, silver, teeth pop and fall out of his mouth and he saw one crush several of the small humans below. Even when he faltered he was a deadly force of nature.

The two teeth grew back, silver and all, in a matter of moments as he reached up and used them to rip a massive green and white metal sign off of its posts and throw it at a group of soldiers below.

Beloved champion Dranek.

Goddess. He thought back. But thinking was getting difficult now. More and more he was finding his thoughts simplified. Attack, eat, move. Little more existed in his mind now. Even thinking her title felt like drawing air while drowning. It felt blissful for things to be so simple now.

We have a slight.... problem... my champion.

How.......help?

Smell for the blood of wolves. She instructed him. ***Smell for the scent of anger and fury, and look for clusters of your kin. They deal with non-believers and blasphemers.***

They.... deny you? Goddess?

They try. She admitted.

Dranek owes Goddess life. Dranek will..... He struggled to find the word even though he'd had it only moments before. *......Serve.*

I know you will my dear. And you shall be so handsomely rewarded for it.

Something, some kind of projectile that moved too fast for him to even sense, slammed into his side, punching through both of his shoulder blades, ribs, and organs, and continued onward without even slowing down, and sent him toppling over sideways. Dozens of fellow wolves scattered as fast as they could as he crushed buildings and trees and the odd metal carriages. More than a few of them didn't make it and were crushed badly enough that even THEY couldn't survive it.

Dranek will try.

He slowly lifted himself up on forelegs that shook as they regenerated from the startling amount of damage the round had done.

As he stood to full height another projectile of the same nature ripped his throat out, sending a wave of hot, faintly luminous, blood splashing over the remains of a building that his nose told him was some kind of restaurant.

He turned toward the direction the round had come from. Then jumped out of the way just as another round came at him. He almost dodged it, and felt a line of fire blast through his left flank in a long ragged slash.

He saw the hole the projectile had made in the woods near town, smelled the ozone of some kind of magic from where it had passed, though it was unlike anything he'd ever smelled before.

He began to charge toward it, occasionally dodging left or right.

First. This thing dies.

\---

"Ohhhhh. The humans have brought out one of their magnetic cannons." War said in a fit of joy that was atypical of him. "Oh, I do so love some of the weapons this world has come up with. We need to make more of these No-Magic worlds. Very innovative in their bloodshed."

Moon sighed as she looked around the vision space that had just manifested. It wasn't uncommon for the other gods to put one in place when Apotheosis was approaching. Especially now that Logic and Lust had both shown up. They always showed up at the same time, and they constantly bickered. But they loved having Visuals for everything.

"War!" She hissed, pulling the weapon laden god form's attention. "How was that MORTAL here?"

War rolled his eyes, which was impressive given his crustacean-like anatomy, at the question.

"It's apotheosis Moon." He said simply, as if that answered anything at all. "The rules always get a little..... loose.... when a god is born." He went back to the somewhat reclined position he'd been in and looked back upon the world.

"Still. A mortal was here. IN OUR REALM." She reiterated. "And it was HIM. HOW?"

War took in a deep breath.

"Your obsession with hims is adorable Moon. Really. You should make some demi-gods with him. That world hasn't had any of those in a while. Nice change of pace." He said as he smiled. Below them a squad of Soldiers had just opened up with an automatic grenade launcher and were absolutely wreaking havoc on the Moon's children. And most of the nearby buildings too. "But it's not like he's the first one to ever get here."

"Those were all vestiges during prayer rituals." She shot back. "People who requested, and were granted audience. HE wouldn't do that. And you know it."

War simply shrugged with his three shoulders. "Yeah, and he's probably in a coma now. Or will be. Not many mortals have gotten eyes on our true forms and kept their minds intact. Only issue this will cause is if it ruins his story line."

A sudden stillness came over the space as a ***NEW*** voice spoke.

"I... brought him here." Said the new voice. The tone, pitch, and even cadence of the new voice rapidly shifted as it spoke. It's form was humanoid in shape, but all of its features were soft and indistinguishable.

"This is earlier than expected." War said to her in a whisper. "Is it supposed to have happened already?"

"Apologies." It said, as though it had heard the question, and as a god it probably had. "It is simply my way."

Moon tensed even as she saw other gods around the space growing uneasy around the new member of their kind.

"Who..... or WHAT... are you?" Life asked. Life was always the one to ask. It was their role in these things.

The new god looked at life with a soft smile as its form took on one that was similar to a human. But uglier, and hairier, and a little hunched. It was wearing simple animal furs and clutched a rudimentary spear.

"I am the proto-human." It said as it began to pace around and examine each of them. "Half starved, sick with illnesses that no longer exist, surrounded by wolves as they circle him for their dinner. Determined to make them work for their meal."

It looked down at the world below with another of those soft smiles as its form shifted to one of ancient Greek features, wearing tattered, blood soaked bronze armor and wielding a broken spear and a shield covered in dents and embedded arrows.

"I am King Leonidas and the few thousand free Greeks who stood against an army that outnumbered them twenty to one and had them surrounded."

It shifted to the form of a sweaty, dirty, African man with no shirt on and scars across his back. A noose extended from its neck up out of sight.

"I am the slave. Who could no longer accept a master."

Another form shift and it was a skinny, bald, pale woman.

"I am the patient." It said as it neared Death, who smiled at it. Death never smiled at any of them except life. "Whose days can be counted on their fingers. But who will still go to their doctors appointments. To gatherings with friends and families even though it exhausts them. Who continues to attempt survival because what other option is there?"

It became a small child with ratty clothes and a tattered book in one hand.

"I am the child of a destitute family. Who will be lucky to see adulthood. And even though I will need to move heaven and earth to get anywhere, I study harder than any other child my age. Because I know that moving heaven and earth are the only way I will get anywhere or become anything.

It shifted again as it leaned against a pillar that hadn't been there until it had moved to lean. And it was wearing a bloody, soot stained, version of the uniform the soldiers below wore. But with a black and blue polo shirt. It leaned because its left leg now ended in a bloody stump.

"I am PFC Anthony Goodson. Who is, as we speak, about to die. He is still wearing the pizza delivery shirt that he'd been wearing when his Reserve Unit called him into action." It smiled, but the smile was sad this time. "He has five.... no.... four... rounds left in his rifle. His leg is pinned under some debris from the building his squad had been in and he cannot move. And your wolves are closing in on him." It said with an accusatory glance at Moon. "And he will die a bloody, senseless death. But he will do so with an empty magazine and a bloody combat knife."

It shifted again, and now it WAS one of those werewolves. It had the subtle curves that marked it as a woman, and Moon recognized the form.

"I am Corporal Samantha Leray Jenkins. Who thought she was dead. Only to reawaken as something from her nightmares, and begin receiving instructions from a goddess." This time it stared at Moon with that same sad smile. "And even though there is no solid evidence AGAINST this goddess's existence. I have denied her and I fight her forces with literal tooth and nail."

Moon spoke the word that she had had on the tip of her tongue as she had dealt with the handful of Earth humans who had resisted her.

"Defiance." She hissed.

The new god smiled at her and nodded. Its form shifted to that of the very Mortal who had intruded on their space.

"Don't wear it out." Defiance said in a deeper version of James Choi's voice.

Then, as the pantheon exploded into angry accusations and impromptu prophesying, Defiance walked over to a, previously non-existent, chair and sat down.

Moon glared at it as one of the other Gods harried her about how she had brought such a God into apotheosis.

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Jenkins was tired as she faced off against yet another of the werewolves.

Her body bore more wounds than she thought she had ever gotten in the rest of her life.

Still, she fought. The beast lunged at her.

"Serve." It said just as she dodged to the side and slashed her new claws down its side. It whimpered and skittered away as the last of its tattered lab coat fell away from it, coated in its own blood.

"Fuck you!" She yelled in her new, deeper, voice. It hurt to talk. A bullet from one of her own brothers in arms had hit her in the chest a few minutes earlier. She'd lived thanks to her new form. But it still hurt.

The wolf jumped up on a piece of wreckage near it and then leapt into the air with its claws extended toward her. She jumped towards it, clearing at least ten feet before she impacted the beast and the two of them began rolling over and over like the dogs they now resembled.

"I'm not gonna be a monster just because some jumped up wannabe deity made me look like one." She said as she managed to get the beast in a makeshift arm bar. She snapped its arm without hesitation, then as it began to cry got it into a choke hold and began strangling it into unconsciousness.

She'd only managed that tactic on a few of the other wolves she'd faced. The rest she'd had to put down in a messier fashion, and hope that they healed from it.

It took a few minutes. She knew from her own new physiology that the wolf's neck and throat were much larger, and assumed that their hearts were too. So choking them out was time exhaustive.

The ground beneath her shuddered as the massive wolf rampaging on the other side of the town did something.

Gotta stay away from that thing. She thought.

Samantha Jenkins. A voice said to her. But it wasn't the voice that had spoken to her earlier. ***You have a defiant soul.***

Great. She thought. *Which one are you? Jesus? Horus? Maybe some Aztec god or something?*

I am none of the ones you know. It replied. And she got a sense that this speaker was sad somehow. Or maybe tired. ***But I come with an

offer. I ask for no service nor devotion. I ask only that you continue to defy those who would control you.***

She felt the werewolf wrapped in her arms and legs begin weakening.

Yeah? And what do I get out of this offer? Or... more importantly... what do YOU get out of it?

You will gain the power to end this battle. And, though you are already one in spirit, I.... will gain a champion.

The ground shuddered again, closer this time. And Jenkins heard some great movement of the wind as it seemed to pulse.

Then a massive, fur laden, slightly glowing, nose moved over the building near her and began to sniff.

Oh shit. She thought as she considered the offer.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yyut6o/wait_is_this_just_gate_264/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (262/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yw7t0p/wait_is_this_just_gate_261/)

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Enjoy.

\~

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THAT caused the moon to stop and consider.

It was one thing to help create a new member of their kind. That would have been more than enough for the others to forgive her intrusion on this test dimension. But she didn't want them to see her being resisted

by her own subjects. A denier and blasphemer here or there was one thing, in fact it was practically a given. But as she looked down at the chaos occurring near her champion, she felt several dozen of the new werewolves in various levels of rebellion against her commands. She had well over a hundred new children now, but that was still an insanely high ratio of blasphemy.

And as if that wasn't enough her champion was being resisted much more effectively than she'd expected. It was still winning of course. These humans would have to use something MUCH bigger to even come close to stopping its slow progress toward the nearby town. But they were remarkably good at slowing it down, distracting it, and hitting it in ways that hindered, even if only for seconds.

The cost to life was already extraordinary.

But still, she had to wonder just what kind of GOD would be born of a world like this.

She'd hoped for technology, destruction, or maybe even something esoteric, like maybe the god of atomics, or industry or something. Those would have made sense given this world's colorful history.

They could definitely create a god of communication. She thought to herself. *They've petty much perfected planetary communication. Only thing holding them back is the speed of light at this point. And LIGHT will never budge on that front.*

But the battle below, even in the non military areas, was speaking to a human nature that she had no frame of reference for. People simply did not struggle like this. At least not in any of the OTHER universes. Why were these ones so different?

She thought back to her meeting with the Summoned Hero after he'd killed her favorite champion. He was different too.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of a god whose familiar energy made her recoil in mild annoyance.

"Hello moon." Said a slow, deep, echoing voice. "It's been a long time since we've shared a dimension."

"Darkness." She said coldly. "Glad you could join us."

"New god." Darkness said as it expanded its consciousness to view the world and its history, as well as the current situation. "Your doing? Bit young for that aren't you?"

"I am as old as any of you are, plus or minus a few aeons for celestial creation in the original existence." She shot back.

"And the need for the worshipers of said celestial body. Which makes you significantly YOUNGER than those of us who CREATED that original

existence." Darkness said coyly. "What an amusing scenario. I can't wait to see what kind of deity YOU create."

Moon seethed as she felt darkness move away and begin examining things more closely.

She turned her own attention back to the werewolves in the battle below.

"That seemed awkward." Said war from where he basked in the violent energies below. "Want a hand with this part? It is kind of my field after all."

"No." She replied angrily.

They all felt the growing presence that was on the verge of being created amongst them.

Resting calmly and unnoticed, as they always were despite their power, Life and Death looked on in mild amusement.

\----------

Vickers emerged from the door into the castle with his arm in a sling and a lit cigarette in his mouth.

He limped past the Petravian soldiers and mages and pulled his two new prisoners along with him. He'd had their legs cut free of the webbing just so they could walk.

"Come on." He said. "You two more than anyone need to be brought in immediately.

First Sergeant Nguyen hung his head even as the Major glared at the back of the SEAL's head.

\["You oughta be ashamed of yourself Chief."\] The woman spat at his back. \["Your career is over. You're a dead man walking if you ever get back to Earth."\]

Vickers halted his limping, aching, trudge with a sigh as he glanced back at her.

"Shut up." He said simply. "You clearly don't get what's going on."

\["And what's that, Traitor?"\] She replied.

This time Vickers stopped entirely and turned to face them, oblivious of the soldiers milling past them toward the healers ward.

"You got played major." He said simply. "Think about it. First, they sent a maniac like you. Someone who's probably been screaming for blood and glory for the good ole U.S.A. since she was a kid watching propaganda about the war. They sent that kinda person on what was

essentially a scientific research trip." He shrugged. "Granted, they sent you with reinforcements to save that trip, but still."

She began to speak but he cut her off.

"They already had a cover for people being in this world. Hell, I'm half the reason they had to make that cover up." He gestured at the castle around them. "They had peace with these people and they sent MUCK MARCHERS to clean up a small spill on the sand?" He looked at Nguyen. "That make sense to either of you? Cause that's going zero to a hundred real fuckin quick in my books."

He began walking again, pulling their restraints as he did.

"Then, instead of simply poppin' smoke and gettin' y'all the hell out of there and somewhere else where you could maaaaaybe make a new cover story. They double down! They bring in more troops, the muck marcher tech boys, goddam Miffy's. I mean, talk about goin' all in. Surprised they didn't have you setting up a landing strip for an air base."

Neither of the prisoners spoke up about the fact that a helicopter pad and a small surveillance chopper had been next on the plan for the FOB.

"Then a REAL fight comes to your door. Even gives you prep time cause your position and drones let you see em coming." He stopped and turned to face them again. "And command KNOWS what the Petravians are capable of physically and somewhat magically. They have reports from me and Choi. But what do they do to support you? Do they send more people? More vehicles? More bombs? Anything?"

After a moment of neither of them answering he continues.

"Nope." He says smugly as he turns back and begins walking once again. "They let you swing on the noose you tied for yourself. And they had footage of all of it that they could study and analyze to their hearts content."

Suddenly the Major's angry expression shifted to one of understanding.

"You were never sent here to conquer.... MAJOR." Vickers continued, putting as much venom into her rank as possible. "You were a goddam sacrificial guinea pig. They just wanted to see what the Petravians were really capable of against their favorite toys. And you gave em one hell of a show."

As he finished the statement they rounded a corner and were greeted by a pair of guards in front of a row of prison cells.

"VIP's for the King's detainment." He said as he handed the ropes tied around their spider silk cocoons. "The leaders of the invading camp."

The guards accepted the ropes eagerly, even as they eyed Vickers' extensive injuries.

"I'm not a traitor Major." He said as she moved past him. "I'll do what I can to get our people free. Or at least off the chopping block. But don't kid yourself. You two will probably be off the table when it comes to pardons or whatever." He turned to Nguyen, whose head was still hanging. "Cept maybe you Top." He said. "Giving the order to stand down might help. Sorry things went this way."

\["You're wrong chief."\] The Major said. \["They wouldn't do that to their own people."\]

Vickers stopped and laughed as he took the last few puffs of the smoke while he stood in the doorway. He wanted to say something profound or witty. But he was just too tired. Too sore.

"Just shut the fuck up you fuckin' idiot." He said as he walked away and toward the healing ward.

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\[Small writer's note: Not trying to mess with formatting or accidentally post something here with a fake URL. So I'm just gonna use brackets for this next section. You'll get the idea.\]

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H2OGoon: Yo, you guys seeing this shit outside of Sturgis?

EndlessWeebery: CGI on it is pretty epic. Looks like a cross between an old Del Toro movie and Princess Mononoke

BigCLITEnergy24-7: Don't understand why they're doing it found footage style though. Think it has anything to do with that weird foreign dessert video. *\[Youtube URL\]* The one that looks like WoW vs CoD23?

HowleySimp: The werewolves are sexy <3

H2OGoon: Oh great. The furries are here.

HowleySimp: ;P

StunningLinguist562: Did you guys understand anything in the dessert video? I mean, obviously the soldier lady was speaking english. But what was that other language? The one the super model looking paladin lady was speaking? Sounded like Romanian and Tagalog had hate sex with each other or something.

The-Bob: She was sexy tho. That weird glow filter on her face when she was talking was weird. But other than that, solid 5/7 would gladly disappoint.

EndlessWeebery: 100% TROOF

Hippo-Nat20-Critical: Can't believe the army is getting so #RECKT Back when I was in they would've lit that big ole fuzzball with a couple JDAMs by now.

HowleySimp: No! He's a good boi. D-:

EndlessWeebery: It's not like it's real.

Hippo-Nat20-Critical: Yeah, and the lack of big gun usage is part of what makes it unbelievable. MOAR DAKKA!

Natthecat: It's very real, and its terrifying. There were soldiers right outside my house until a few minutes ago.

BigCLITEnergy24-7: Bullshit. Pics or it didn't happen.

Natthecat: Can't do sound because it's too noisy. And there's wolves outside. Big wolves. *\[Streaming embed\]*

HowleySimp: Ooooh wolfies! Show us some toe beans! Pwetty pwease.

....

....

....

H2OGoon: Holy shit Natthecat. Is that real?

Hippo-Nat20-Critical: Damn, ole gunner boi was rockin the .50 and they still got his ass. *\[Salute GIF\]* RIP brother.

Natthecat: I'm going to hide now. The soldiers outside are all gone and there's so many wolves. I think I heard one in my back yard. My parents were on a date tonight. They're out there somewhere.

-User: Natthecat has left the chat.-

The-Bob: Well that was fake af. She could've at least shown us something hot.

EndlessWeebery: That blood did look super fake. And there was way too much of it. I mean, sure the guy got his head ripped off. But still, Tarantino much?

H2OGoon: Anybody else suddenly craving chili? BRB.

-User: H2OGoon has left the chat.-

HowleySimp: I don't think I want to see THOSE werewolves anymore. So nasty XP

StuningLinguist562: Seriously? Anyone recognize that language?

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yy6dut/wait_is_this_just_gate_263/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (262/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yw7r29/wait_is_this_just_gate_261/) /
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And as if that wasn't enough her champion was being resisted much more effectively than she'd expected. It was still winning of course. These humans would have to use something MUCH bigger to even come close to stopping its slow progress toward the nearby town. But they were remarkably good at slowing it down, distracting it, and hitting it in ways that hindered, even if only for seconds.

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But still, she had to wonder just what kind of GOD would be born of a world like this.

She'd hoped for technology, destruction, or maybe even something esoteric, like maybe the god of atomics, or industry or something. Those would have made sense given this world's colorful history.

They could definitely create a god of communication. She thought to herself. *They've petty much perfected planetary communication. Only thing holding them back is the speed of light at this point. And LIGHT will never budge on that front.*

But the battle below, even in the non military areas, was speaking to a human nature that she had no frame of reference for. People simply did not struggle like this. At least not in any of the OTHER universes. Why were these ones so different?

She thought back to her meeting with the Summoned Hero after he'd killed her favorite champion. He was different too.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of a god whose familiar energy made her recoil in mild annoyance.

"Hello moon." Said a slow, deep, echoing voice. "It's been a long time since we've shared a dimension."

"Darkness." She said coldly. "Glad you could join us."

"New god." Darkness said as it expanded its consciousness to view the world and its history, as well as the current situation. "Your doing? Bit young for that aren't you?"

"I am as old as any of you are, plus or minus a few aeons for celestial creation in the original existence." She shot back.

"And the need for the worshipers of said celestial body. Which makes you significantly YOUNGER than those of us who CREATED that original existence." Darkness said coyly. "What an amusing scenario. I can't wait to see what kind of deity YOU create."

Moon seethed as she felt darkness move away and begin examining things more closely.

She turned her own attention back to the werewolves in the battle below.

"That seemed awkward." Said war from where he basked in the violent energies below. "Want a hand with this part? It is kind of my field after all."

"No." She replied angrily.

They all felt the growing presence that was on the verge of being created amongst them.

Resting calmly and unnoticed, as they always were despite their power, Life and Death looked on in mild amusement.

\------------------------------

Vickers emerged from the door into the castle with his arm in a sling and a lit cigarette in his mouth.

He limped past the Petravian soldiers and mages and pulled his two new prisoners along with him. He'd had their legs cut free of the webbing just so they could walk.

"Come on." He said. "You two more than anyone need to be brought in immediately.

First Sergeant Nguyen hung his head even as the Major glared at the back of the SEAL's head.

\["You oughta be ashamed of yourself Chief."\] The woman spat at his back. \["Your career is over. You're a dead man walking if you ever get back to Earth."\]

Vickers halted his limping, aching, trudge with a sigh as he glanced back at her.

"Shut up." He said simply. "You clearly don't get what's going on."

\["And what's that, Traitor?"\] She replied.

This time Vickers stopped entirely and turned to face them, oblivious of the soldiers milling past them toward the healers ward.

"You got played major." He said simply. "Think about it. First, they sent a maniac like you. Someone who's probably been screaming for blood and glory for the good ole U.S.A. since she was a kid watching propaganda about the war. They sent that kinda person on what was essentially a scientific research trip." He shrugged. "Granted, they sent you with reinforcements to save that trip, but still."

She began to speak but he cut her off.

"They already had a cover for people being in this world. Hell, I'm half the reason they had to make that cover up." He gestured at the castle around them. "They had peace with these people and they sent MUCK MARCHERS to clean up a small spill on the sand?" He looked at Nguyen. "That make sense to either of you? Cause that's going zero to a hundred real fuckin quick in my books."

He began walking again, pulling their restraints as he did.

"Then, instead of simply poppin' smoke and gettin' y'all the hell out of there and somewhere else where you could maaaaaybe make a new cover story. They double down! They bring in more troops, the muck marcher tech

boys, goddam Miffy's. I mean, talk about goin' all in. Surprised they didn't have you setting up a landing strip for an air base."

Neither of the prisoners spoke up about the fact that a helicopter pad and a small surveillance chopper had been next on the plan for the FOB.

"Then a REAL fight comes to your door. Even gives you prep time cause your position and drones let you see em coming." He stopped and turned to face them again. "And command KNOWS what the Petravians are capable of physically and somewhat magically. They have reports from me and Choi. But what do they do to support you? Do they send more people? More vehicles? More bombs? Anything?"

After a moment of neither of them answering he continues.

"Nope." He says smugly as he turns back and begins walking once again. "They let you swing on the noose you tied for yourself. And they had footage of all of it that they could study and analyze to their hearts content."

Suddenly the Major's angry expression shifted to one of understanding.

"You were never sent here to conquer.... MAJOR." Vickers continued, putting as much venom into her rank as possible. "You were a goddam sacrificial guinea pig. They just wanted to see what the Petravians were really capable of against their favorite toys. And you gave em one hell of a show."

As he finished the statement they rounded a corner and were greeted by a pair of guards in front of a row of prison cells.

"VIP's for the King's detainment." He said as he handed the ropes tied around their spider silk cocoons. "The leaders of the invading camp."

The guards accepted the ropes eagerly, even as they eyed Vickers' extensive injuries.

"I'm not a traitor Major." He said as she moved past him. "I'll do what I can to get our people free. Or at least off the chopping block. But don't kid yourself. You two will probably be off the table when it comes to pardons or whatever." He turned to Nguyen, whose head was still hanging. "Cept maybe you Top." He said. "Giving the order to stand down might help. Sorry things went this way."

\["You're wrong chief."\] The Major said. \["They wouldn't do that to their own people."\]

Vickers stopped and laughed as he took the last few puffs of the smoke while he stood in the doorway. He wanted to say something profound or witty. But he was just too tired. Too sore.

"Just shut the fuck up you fuckin' idiot." He said as he walked away and toward the healing ward.

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\[Small writer's note: Not trying to mess with formatting or accidentally post something here with a fake URL. So I'm just gonna use brackets for this next section. You'll get the idea.\]

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H2OGoon: Yo, you guys seeing this shit outside of Sturgis?

EndlessWeebery: CGI on it is pretty epic. Looks like a cross between an old Del Toro movie and Princess Mononoke

BigCLITEnergy24-7: Don't understand why they're doing it found footage style though. Think it has anything to do with that weird foreign dessert video. *\[Youtube URL\]* The one that looks like WoW vs CoD23?

HowleySimp: The werewolves are sexy <3

H2OGoon: Oh great. The furries are here.

HowleySimp: ;P

StunningLinguist562: Did you guys understand anything in the dessert video? I mean, obviously the soldier lady was speaking english. But what was that other language? The one the super model looking paladin lady was speaking? Sounded like Romanian and Tagalog had hate sex with each other or something.

The-Bob: She was sexy tho. That weird glow filter on her face when she was talking was weird. But other than that, solid 5/7 would gladly disappoint.

EndlessWeebery: 100% TROOF

Hippo-Nat20-Critical: Can't believe the army is getting so #RECKT Back when I was in they would've lit that big ole fuzzball with a couple JDAMs by now.

HowleySimp: No! He's a good boi. D-:

EndlessWeebery: It's not like it's real.

Hippo-Nat20-Critical: Yeah, and the lack of big gun usage is part of what makes it unbelievable. MOAR DAKKA!

Natthecat: It's very real, and its terrifying. There were soldiers right outside my house until a few minutes ago.

BigCLITEnergy24-7: Bullshit. Pics or it didn't happen.

Natthecat: Can't do sound because it's too noisy. And there's wolves outside. Big wolves. *\[Streaming embed\]*

HowleySimp: Ooooh wolfies! Show us some toe beans! Pwetty pwease.

....

....

....

H2OGoon: Holy shit Natthecat. Is that real?

Hippo-Nat20-Critical: Damn, ole gunner boi was rockin the .50 and they still got his ass. *\[Salute GIF\]* RIP brother.

Natthecat: I'm going to hide now. The soldiers outside are all gone and there's so many wolves. I think I heard one in my back yard. My parents were on a date tonight. They're out there somewhere.

-User: Natthecat has left the chat.-

The-Bob: Well that was fake af. She could've at least shown us something hot.

EndlessWeebery: That blood did look super fake. And there was way too much of it. I mean, sure the guy got his head ripped off. But still, Tarantino much?

H2OGoon: Anybody else suddenly craving chili? BRB.

-User: H2OGoon has left the chat.-

HowleySimp: I don't think I want to see THOSE werewolves anymore. So nasty XP

StuningLinguist562: Seriously? Anyone recognize that language?

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yy6bbz/wait_is_this_just_gate_263/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (261/?)

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Sid shrugged as he shook his head.

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But she was a nurse, and there were injured people. She'd insisted on staying.

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Since then it had been hours of redoing tourniquets, packing wounds, applying splints, attempting chest seals, when the person's anatomy allowed the. In one case she even had to perform an emergency cricothyrotomy. The soldier in question was a young elf who had been shot through the jaw and also chest. She'd been hesitant of the young woman's anatomy. But then she'd simply knuckled down and gotten to work. One of the lead healers had almost stopped her, but had quickly halted their questioning once they'd seen the soldier's chest begin rising and falling again as they regained their ability to breath.

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Then there had been a commotion near the door and two limp and heavily shrouded people had been brought in and rushed past everybody.

She'd initially brushed them off. They were emergency cases that would need to be dealt with by the head healers, Shrend himself was already moving to follow the two patients.

Then she saw a shock of black hair that was familiar to her, and a dangling wolf arm attached to the same person as the soldiers carried them into the room Shrend had guided them to.

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She dropped the roll of gauze that was in her hand as she ran to the door that the doctor held open for her.

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Where am I? The person inside the monster wondered.

You are my child now. Said a voice that sounded as matronly as it did cold and uncaring.

What? She wondered. *Who are you? What's going on?*

Then the memory flooded back into her mind. The door. The eye. Her friends dying. Wolves chasing her through the dark, red lit, hallways. Pain.

Death.

And as if the thought had conjured them into being, she felt something inside of her that was.... other. Some primal, bestial, entity. She had the sensation that it was circling her inside her own mind.

I... am the moon. And I am your mother. The voice answered.

No. No you're not my mother. I know my mother. This. This isn't happening. I'm dead.

You came close. And do not spurn me child. I am the only reason you AREN'T dead.

Suddenly, as if a light switch had been turned on, she was able to see.

But her view was NOT where it was supposed to be.

Last she'd seen she had been lying on a concrete floor with a monster biting down on her shoulder and killing her.

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Her eyes snapped toward something that she'd smelled. And OH GOD She could smell. She could smell so much. She smelled the asphalt below her feet. She smelled the garbage in the trashcan she sped past in a blur. She smelled the steak sandwiches that.... *Hey wait, those are the sandwiches from Jerry's bar and grill. I'd recognize that garlic and horse radish spread anywhere.* She thought.

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Then her view was filled with the sight of a middle aged woman in a puffy jacket, who'd dropped her phone as Samantha Jenkins, now a werewolf, flew around a corner and out of an alleyway in front of the woman.

Slay her child. The voice said.

What?!? No! Jenkins tried to say.

She tried to resist. She really did.

But her muscles moved of their own accord, the animal instincts in her mind surged at the thought of a kill. Resisting them was like trying to push back a tidal wave.

Before she could think even a single thought more, she was on the poor woman.

Blood filled her view, her sense of smell..... and her mouth.

NO! No....nonononono!

A good kill my child.

I AM NOT... YOUR CHILD! She yelled back in her mind. *NO MOTHER WOULD EVER ASK FOR THIS!*

As if in answer, her animal instincts made her tear open the dead woman's stomach and latch her jaws onto the liver inside. Something jostled her and she send a clawed hand lashing at whatever it was.

DO NOT.... resist me child. The voice demanded. ***You are of MY pack now.***

The thing that she'd lashed at tackled her, and she was suddenly looking up into the gaping maw of another werewolf. Some small part of her wondered whether it was the one that had killed her.

No.... it had turned her. Turned her into one of its kind.

"LISTEN...." The blood soaked creature yelled at her. And she gawked at the fact that it could speak. "TO... THE GODDESS!"

Goddess? She wondered.

That's right child. Now you know what you are "Attempting" to resist against.

That snapped the control that the animal inside her had.

Her clawed hand slammed into the wolf's chest, fingers (claws) first and sank in deeply. Despite its inhuman features, she could read the surprise there. Then she did the only thing she could think of and latched onto its throat with her newly dagger like teeth.

What are you doing child? The so-called "Goddess" asked her in a harried tone.

"I told you." She growled with her actual voice as she finished the bite, leaving the other werewolf clutching at its throat on the ground with a large piece of its neck missing. Her voice was much deeper and rumbled now. "You are NOT my mother. If you were you would know that you are not my GODDESS either."

She looked down at the corpse of the dead woman on the ground, wiping the blood from her mouth as best she could. She was surprised to find a lock of reddish brown hair stuck in her teeth. It didn't match the dead woman. She realized that she must have killed someone else before "Waking up".

She clutched at her heart for a moment.

"Because my mother raised me Buddhist." She said as she took a halting step backwards. She tripped and looked down to see long, fur coated, wolf feet beneath her. "She raised me to be non-violent." She looked back at the red hair in her hand. "Never took. But....." She shuddered. "Oh god."

Do not resist me child. The voice said in her head. ***Only fools resist gods.***

Something crashed somewhere in front of her, and when she looked she saw two more werewolves, one of whom was wearing the tattered remains of what looked like a prisoners uniform. She'd seen uniforms like that back in the base.

The two wolves looked at her and bared their teeth, eyes gleaming in the darkness as the slowly began moving toward her.

My children WILL obey.

She lowered down, hands extending their claws out to the side in an instinctive gesture of hostility.

They're gonna obey someone alright. She thought.

Then she charged at the two wolves.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yx6zki/wait_is_this_just_gate_262/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (261/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yv9y76/wait_is_this_just_gate_260/) /
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She tried to resist. She really did.

But her muscles moved of their own accord, the animal instincts in her mind surged at the thought of a kill. Resisting them was like trying to push back a tidal wave.

Before she could think even a single thought more, she was on the poor woman.

Blood filled her view, her sense of smell..... and her mouth.

NO! No....nonononono!

A good kill my child.

I AM NOT... YOUR CHILD! She yelled back in her mind. *NO MOTHER WOULD EVER ASK FOR THIS!*

As if in answer, her animal instincts made her tear open the dead woman's stomach and latch her jaws onto the liver inside. Something jostled her and she send a clawed hand lashing at whatever it was.

DO NOT.... resist me child. The voice demanded. ***You are of MY pack now.***

The thing that she'd lashed at tackled her, and she was suddenly looking up into the gaping maw of another werewolf. Some small part of her wondered whether it was the one that had killed her.

No.... it had turned her. Turned her into one of its kind.

"LISTEN...." The blood soaked creature yelled at her. And she gawked at the fact that it could speak. "TO... THE GODDESS!"

Goddess? She wondered.

That's right child. Now you know what you are "Attempting" to resist against.

That snapped the control that the animal inside her had.

Her clawed hand slammed into the wolf's chest, fingers (claws) first and sank in deeply. Despite its inhuman features, she could read the surprise there. Then she did the only thing she could think of and latched onto its throat with her newly dagger like teeth.

What are you doing child? The so-called "Goddess" asked her in a harried tone.

"I told you." She growled with her actual voice as she finished the bite, leaving the other werewolf clutching at its throat on the ground with a large piece of its neck missing. Her voice was much deeper and rumbled now. "You are NOT my mother. If you were you would know that you are not my GODDESS either."

She looked down at the corpse of the dead woman on the ground, wiping the blood from her mouth as best she could. She was surprised to find a lock of reddish brown hair stuck in her teeth. It didn't match the dead woman. She realized that she must have killed someone else before "Waking up".

She clutched at her heart for a moment.

"Because my mother raised me Buddhist." She said as she took a halting step backwards. She tripped and looked down to see long, fur coated, wolf feet beneath her. "She raised me to be non-violent." She looked back at the red hair in her hand. "Never took. But....." She shuddered. "Oh god."

Do not resist me child. The voice said in her head. ***Only fools resist gods.***

Something crashed somewhere in front of her, and when she looked she saw two more werewolves, one of whom was wearing the tattered remains of what looked like a prisoners uniform. She'd seen uniforms like that back in the base.

The two wolves looked at her and bared their teeth, eyes gleaming in the darkness as they slowly began moving toward her.

My children WILL obey.

She lowered down, hands extending their claws out to the side in an instinctive gesture of hostility.

They're gonna obey someone alright. She thought.

Then she charged at the two wolves.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yx6xsu/wait_is_this_just_gate_262/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (260/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yrvbae/wait_is_this_just_gate_259/)

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In the mean time; everyone's alive-ish. Yaaaaay.

Enjoy.

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Red lights flashed over the emergency white lights as the siren sounded, broken by the occasional robotic voice of the P.A. system.

-ALERT! SECURITY BREACH! ALL PERSONNEL REPORT TO EMERGENCY STATIONS! ALERT! SECURITY BREACH! ALL PERSONNEL REPORT TO EMERGENCY STATIONS!-

Something rumbled through the ground beneath her feet as she ran.

What the hell was that? She wondered as the announcement sounded again.

She had been sleeping when the initial klaxons had sounded, raising her up from the land of dreams in her quarters. She'd quickly thrown her duty pants and socks on, then her combat boots and vest simultaneously, one hand working each as she went. She'd rushed out the door while still strapping on her helmet and holstering her pistol.

She rounded the corner and saw her post. Sergeant Tovar waved her over.

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But they weren't faced outward like usual. Instead they were faced at the massive set of doors. The ones with the red paint and black and yellow edging. And the security panels had been lowered and locked over the smaller door to the left of it that was the most commonly used entrance to the base's lower levels.

"Security breach." Tovar replied. "B-three and below. And from the sounds of it the attackers are moving up." He said with his heavily Jamaican accent. He pointed at one of the weapons cages on the wall. "Orders are shotguns with the white mags."

"The new ones?" She asked. He nodded and she set to equipping herself with the weapon and the new ammo. "You're sounding Islander today Sarge." She said.

Normally the Caribbean born man had a neutral accent with a hint of Old New York in it. Something he'd affected after the wars had brought some hostility towards his homeland. But today his native accent colored every word heavily. She knew that it meant he was stressed.

"Radio chatter sounds more insane than expected." He said sternly. "Get out their with Chuckle and Fuckle."

She nodded and moved out next to Reyes, who she knew was Fuckle because he had eight kids.

"Sup Jenk." He said as he looked at the massive red door.

"Sup Rey." She said in return. "This sounds like a shit show."

Something rumbled below them again. Everyone looked down, including Murray, who'd just come running around the corner.

"Ya." Reyes said. "Fuckin' aliens and shit." He added.

"There aint no fuckin' aliens." Deggigi said in his Texas drawl. "It's fuckin' vampires." He said with the chuckle that had earned him HIS nickname. Though he and Reyes were only Chuckle and Fuckle when they were on duty together, which the Sergeants made sure happened often as a result.

"Is it the fuckin' aliens?" Murray asked as he came running out of the office, still loading a shotgun.

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Then there was another shudder. This one long and drawn out and rumbling like a train was passing by. Some dust fell from the ceiling as a crack formed near the door. They all watched it, mouths shut, as the emergency lights flickered a few times.

There was a long, deeply baritone, noise that sounded familiar to Jenkins as they heard it. It reverberated through the entire building as effectively as if it had been broadcast on the P.A. speakers.

"Biggest fuckin' coyote I ever heard." Diggigi said.

It clicked in Jenkins' head that he was right, just in time for a chorus of significantly weaker howls reverberated behind it.

"The fuck?" Reyes asked beside her just as Sergeant Tovar sprinted out of the office and down the hall away from them. "What the fuck?" He repeated, echoing everyone else's thoughts as they watched the Sergeant run down the corridor and out of sight.

Something impacted the small pedestrian door next to the main one, drawing their attention to it as they all subconsciously shouldered their shotguns.

"The fuck?" Reyes said for a third time.

Something on the other side of the door snarled as something massive slammed into the large red door hard enough to send cracks spidering through the concrete that it was set in.

There was a deep growl and they all saw bright white lite shine through one of the small cracks.

Several loud impacts sounded from both doors as whatever was on the other side began hammering at it repeatedly. There was a vicious slavering noise as whatever they were fought and scrabbled at the reinforced steel and concrete.

Then there was another loud impact and Jenkins heard something screeching from the other side.

Then the red door began to bend inward near its bottom left corner.

"BACK UP!" She yelled. "BACK UP! WHATEVER IT IS IS GETTING THROUGH! SAFETIES OFF!" She ordered, now that she was the ranking soldier there, as she herself snapped the little switch on the side of her shotgun to semi-auto.

Then a massive black talon of some kind punched through the steel of the door like a nail through plywood.

"Aw man." She heard Diggigi say. "It WAS fuckin' aliens."

Before anyone could reply the door screamed open and away from them.

Behind it a massive, white-glowing, eye stared at them from in the darkness. Jenkins blinked in confusion. Nothing had an eye that big. It had to be at least seven feet in diameter. Its pupil alone was bigger than she was.

They heard skittering noises and low growls from in the darkness.

"Fire." She said. "F......Fire. FIRE!" She ordered as she pulled the trigger on her shotgun, sending a roaring blast into the darkness. The buckshot, mainly silver though she didn't know that, impacted the eye and made it retreat back into the darkness beyond with a loud, deep whimper.

The other three opened fire as well, sending countless silver buckshot shells screaming into the unexpectedly open door.

Something blurred past her and collided with Murray, who flew backwards with a yell. He hit the wall with a noise that was much too wet to be a human body.

The fire stopped as everyone remaining turned to look at what had just flown past them.

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Standing over Murray's limp, boneless, bloody body and still holding his right arm in its mouth, was a thing out of cheesy Halloween costume shops and fairy tales.

Jenkins did not live up to all the jokes that had been made about her name throughout childhood and even through Army training.

As everyone else turned their weapons towards the.... werewolf.... cause that's what it was. She ran, unconsciously following Sergeant Tovar's path as she did.

Something flew past her in a furry blur as she passed Reyes, who had been turning to join her. Then she heard him yell "Jenk-" Before hearing a loud crunching noise.

"FUCKLE!" She heard Deggigi yell as his shotgun roared again, this time firing on full auto as the soldier sprayed at a mass of fur and claws and blood that Jenkins was too scared to look back at.

Then the world shook again as something behind her slammed into the wall. The impact shook her off of her feet, and as she looked back she saw the horde of werewolves behind her.

She froze for a moment as she realized what the impact had been. That massive talon from earlier was, it turned out, a nail on a hand. A long, black, slightly curved, nail. Or more accurately, a claw.

Degiggi's body hung limply as that claw and the ,oddly human shaped, hand had impaled him in an impact that could knock a running person from their feet.

As she watched, one of the wolves leaped up and sank its teeth into the dead man's leg and began mauling it like a rabid animal, snarling as it did.

Her shotgun clattered to the ground as she began slowly backpedaling.

"No." She said as first the ears, then the heads and reflective eyes turned to regard her. "Nonononononono."

She bolted, and behind her she heard the snarls and howls and growls of the werewolves.

Jenkins wasn't a fast person. She wasn't slow by any means. But she was only a few inches over five feet and had only really put on any muscle or gained any endurance once she'd joined the military. So, she wasn't exactly setting any running records.

Still, in those terrifying moments as he world stopped making sense, she ran like the wind down the tight, concrete and steel, hallways of the facility she'd been assigned to as an M.P.

She had the advantage of knowing the corridors. She had after all been here for nearly a year now. And as an M.P. patrolling the halls was her job.

She also had the advantage of having a badge on her chest that would open just about any door she needed, even in the current security lock-down.

None of it mattered in the end.

She'd slammed through one of the doors to another corridor, kicking it behind her as she sprung off of it for a slight burst of speed and to shut it as she did. She'd done that several times now.

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Then a set of massive, wickedly sharp, jaws clamped down on her shoulder. They didn't get through the Kevlar weave of her vest. But they also didn't really have to.

She screamed as she felt every bone inside the jaw shatter with a crunch and a flash of pain that made her blackout in a matter of seconds. The jaws were wide enough that they sank into the flesh AROUND her vest's shoulder strap anyways. A set of claws pierced into her opposite shoulder and another into the meat of her waist as the wolf held her in place.

At a little before three in the morning, Corporal Samantha Jenkins lingered on the brink of death.

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Not yet little pup. A voice said from somewhere she was too far gone to hear.

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And at just AFTER three in the morning, she woke back up. Her body burning as bones cracked and snapped into new forms and hair erupted across her mangled body.

She screamed in pain, long and bloody and raw, as her body rebuilt itself into a completely new species.

And as she screamed, the pitch of her voice deepened and grew bestial in nature, before transforming into a howl.

Then, with no control over he instincts, and no knowledge of who or WHAT she was, she joined into the growing mayhem.

And a great, luminous, shaggy wolf. Easily twenty stories high at its shoulders, began to savage the secret military facility. No rounds,

large or small, silver or not, could harm the beast for more than a moment.

Somewhere beyond its senses, aircraft took the the sky to counter it.

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James awoke still in the desert. He was bobbing up and down slightly and covered in something light and breathable. He could only barely see out of one eye, the other was sealed shut.

"Joey?" He asked weakly. "Where's Joey?"

"Silence James." A familiar, Elven, voice said. Though it sounded pained and tired. "Rest. You are badly injured."

"Where's Joseph?" He asked again. "Where's Amina?"

"I'm told your brother rushed through some kind of door and is already back at the Capital." Kai said from where he walked beside James. "And the Princess is only a few yards ahead of you."

"Are they okay?" He asked, his voice a little stronger. "She was hurt too."

"Okay?" He wondered. "Not really. But she'll live. As for your brother I don't know. All I know is that the Arch Mage flew him out of here quickly. He was alive and speaking though, from what I saw."

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"Does that mean there are spiders inside me again?" James wondered.

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James thought for a moment. "No." He said after a few seconds. "Think I'll pass out either way."

"I would actually recommend it." Kai said snidely. "Your body could use it."

The two of them moved along in silence for a few moment. Then Kai spoke again.

"James?" He asked.

"Yeah?" James said, his voice weak and sleepy again.

"I won't be able to do this for you again. Or at least it's highly unlikely." The elf said.

"Okay." James said simply.

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"Working.... on it." James said as he finally passed out the way he'd said he would.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yw7t0p/wait_is_this_just_gate_261/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (260/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yrv8i7/wait_is_this_just_gate_259/) /
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"Silence James." A familiar, Elven, voice said. Though it sounded pained and tired. "Rest. You are badly injured."

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"Okay." James said simply.

"Quit trying to die." Kai said just as simply.

"Working.... on it." James said as he finally passed out the way he'd said he would.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yw7r29/wait_is_this_just_gate_261/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (259/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yqw37g/wait_is_this_just_gate_258/)

Writer's note: And that basically ends this arc. I'm off tomorrow, so no chapter. But I'll be back Monday. Then we start dealing with the fallout of what's happened.

Until then, enjoy.

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^("JOEY!") James yelled, though the sound was drowned out by the wind whipping past him and his little brother as they hovered some fifty feet off the desert ground. ^("JOSEPH!!! LET ME IN!!!! LET ME TALK TO YOU!!!!")

He felt, distantly and in some other body that didn't matter right now, the wind and sand ripping at him. He felt the leg of his pants shred to tatters and felt warm wetness spreading there. He felt his left ear burn as someone held a power grinder to it. He felt that opening in his chest from where he'd been impaled... twice now, actually.

None of it mattered.

He slapped his hands, lightly, over Joey's. But Joey didn't move, still rocking back and forth as he repeated something that James couldn't hear.

He slapped again and felt one of Joey's hands, the left one, lift ever so slightly.

He quickly pressed his mouth to that side and yelled to be heard.

It took every ounce of strength he had to keep himself on Joey's back. Only one foot was emitting a jet now, and only weakly.

^("YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID JOJO! I'M HERE! IT'S OKAY!") He yelled before the hand slammed back down.

He felt something, some invisible blade, slash across his back. Felt pain bloom there. But he'd had his back slashed before. He'd.... probably.... be okay there. But he definitely needed to figure something out. His words just weren't working.

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James shut his eyes and did what he could to tighten even further. He could feel the wind picking back up, felt the sand beginning to grind at his skin again.

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Then something surprised him. Surprised both of them really, as James felt the wind die down almost immediately.

A set of thin arms snaked their way between the two brothers.

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"You're okay?" He asked as James peered over his brother's shoulder, eyes wide.

"I told you I would be." She answered. "Now come on. This is no place for you. We need to get you back to the castle. We don't want you to hurt yourself."

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He worried at that thought.

And the others goddess? He wondered.

Worry not. They shall look to you as their champion. They already know your fate.

He nodded.

"Then let us begin." He said.

The goddess did not give him time to think of anything else. Pain and bliss, in equal measures, coursed through his body as blindingly bright light began to emanate from all over his body.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yva0ie/wait_is_this_just_gate_260/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (259/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yqvznw/wait_is_this_just_gate_258/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: And that basically ends this arc. I'm off tomorrow, so no chapter. But I'll be back Monday. Then we start dealing with the fallout of what's happened.

Until then, enjoy.

\~

^("JOEY!") James yelled, though the sound was drowned out by the wind whipping past him and his little brother as they hovered some fifty feet off the desert ground. ^("JOSEPH!!! LET ME IN!!!! LET ME TALK TO YOU!!!!")

He felt, distantly and in some other body that didn't matter right now, the wind and sand ripping at him. He felt the leg of his pants shred to tatters and felt warm wetness spreading there. He felt his left ear burn as someone held a power grinder to it. He felt that opening in his chest from where he'd been impaled... twice now, actually.

None of it mattered.

He slapped his hands, lightly, over Joey's. But Joey didn't move, still rocking back and forth as he repeated something that James couldn't hear.

He slapped again and felt one of Joey's hands, the left one, lift ever so slightly.

He quickly pressed his mouth to that side and yelled to be heard.

It took every ounce of strength he had to keep himself on Joey's back. Only one foot was emitting a jet now, and only weakly.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (258/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ypyn1x/wait_is_this_just_gate_257/)

Writer's note: Hey look. That person is still around. And things happen. Important things.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina didn't see Vickers' dash to (relative) safety as the last thermobaric round landed on the Miffy he'd just been in, turning it into a pile of crushed, half melted wreckage.

They didn't see the ground open up on the flanks of the FOB, or the massive creatures, only a handful of which were arachnids, that came pouring out of the openings at Kai's guidance. These flattened tents and scooped up Earth soldiers, and occasionally Petravian soldiers, in their claws or hands or mandibles. It took all Kai had to keep them from killing too many, as his spiders subdued and extracted the rest of the Earth forces. These larger creatures raged and bellowed at the sun, which pained their eyes and skin.

They didn't see the last small handfuls of the Earth soldiers, and more than a few civilian employees, emerge from their positions, hands in the air and weapons discarded. The Petravians and spiders took them into custody and began ushering them away from the camp as quickly as they could.

They didn't see the hole in the sand that opened up under a certain bundle of spider silk, swallowing its armored occupant like a mouth. Nor did they see the door that the bundle fell into only a split second later. A door that had no right being where it was, and that disintegrated to mush only moments after it shut behind the bundle.

No. For James and Amina the only things that existed were each other, the sand storm that raged around them, grasping at them and biting into their already abused flesh with each pass, and the boy at the middle of the maelstrom.

The boy who had seen too much. Heard too much. Lost too much. And in doing so, had ended up DOING too much.

That boy sat, curled into a ball, hands clamped over his ears, and rocking back and forth despite the fact that he was nearly twenty feet off of the ground. His mind overwhelmed by too much of everything. But most especially a sense of loss and fear.

Neither of them had much strength to them.

Amina looked like she'd been executed by a firing squad and survived.

James had so many broken bones that he wondered how he was even conscious, and also had a barely sealed hole in his chest, that he imagined had only missed his lung by a few millimeters, if it even had. On top of that he was using what little strength he had to send out his own wind magic. Some of it to fend off his brother's unconscious attacks, and some of it to animate his chain whip so that his sword could intercept and absorb whatever it could. And the poor weapon was working overtime.

And she was the only reason he was even moving.

"JOOOOOEEEEEYYY!!!" He yelled into the wind, trying to get his brother's attention as they trudged through the biting sand.

"He's too strong!" Amina yelled into his ear as she continued carrying him along. "We're not making up ground because the sand keeps shifting our way!"

He ignored her.

He had to.

"JOJO IT'S ME!" He yelled instead. "IT'S JAMES! YOU GOTTA STOP BUD! I'M HERE FOR YOU!"

Choose life. The nonchalant, seemingly pristine, version of him had said.

"James I can't get any closer." Amina said. "I can't. The sand is resisting." She continued, struggling to breath as her opposite hand held part of her tattered, bloody, cloak to her face so she could breath. "I'm too weak. I need to rest." Even as she said this he felt her sag a little as the sand and his weight took her footing from her a bit.

Kill! The twisted, barely recognizable, hateful version of himself had demanded.

James looked at her, the woman he loved so much, and saw the weariness there. He didn't know what had happened to her, or how she'd gotten in the state she was in. But he had a feeling that she was worse off than he was, somehow.

Then he looked at his brother.

Angels and devils kid. The middle road James had said.

They were so close. If he could just reach Joey he could get him to calm down. Could get him back.

The other HIMs... had implied that he would have to make some kind of choice here.

But this wasn't a choice.

This was his brother.

It was Jojo.

The wiggly little baby that James had happily held in his arms and carried all over their house after he'd been born.

The little autistic child that he had helped learn numbers and letters and words, even when he himself only barely understood them either.

The brother who, when their father had walked out their front door, destined to never return again, he had promised to look after and provide for.

So the choice wasn't for Joey's life. It never would be.

It was a choice about James's life.

And it wasn't even about whether or not he would survive. That had NEVER been a factor in any of the equations involving his little brother.

No. This choice was about what he might be able to live with it afterwords should he survive the next few minutes.

But first he had to save Joey.

"Throw me." He said.

Amina looked up at him in surprise. His sword lashed out at an unseen attack behind her and drank in the wind magic as it did.

"What?" She asked.

James leaned into her and pressed the handle of his chain into her battered hand.

"It uses wind magic to move. The sword does the rest. It'll watch after you." He said as they bumped foreheads. "But you have to throw me. Otherwise I can't get to him."

"James no. He's out of control. The wind will tear you to shreds." She countered.

He looked at her and smiled.

"Yeah. But he's my brother." He looked up at Joey, who had gone even higher. He wondered if his brother was somehow aware of them being there, and realized that he must have been. Maybe the added height was meant to keep them away. "And I made a promise."

He looked back over at her, at the eyes that pleaded for him not to go.

Had his mother had the same look when his father had walked away toward that fateful bus, all those years ago?

"If we survive this.... why don't we get married?"

Amina, despite everything else, smiled.

"I think I'd like that." She said.

Then her hands shot into the sand beneath him and under his feet.

And with what little strength her body had left in its aching, torn, bruised, muscles, she heaved him up into the air. James launched up and just a bit towards Joey, nearly ten feet off of the ground before he felt gravity begin to pull again.

Small jets of magical energy sputtered into life from the bottom of his feet. They weren't strong. They ebbed and flowed as he struggled to gather enough energy to maintain them. This was made more difficult by the defensive blasts of air he was having to send out with his hands, while also using them to stabilize himself in the tornado like vortex of wind and sand.

But slowly and surely, he began to rise up and toward his brother.

\------------------------------

Colonel Muhammed stood tall in the secret, teleconference, hearing with the Pentagon.

"This entire operation has gone completely FUBAR Colonel." Said Lieutenant General Dibiallo. "We have two Servicemen who have gone completely native and acted against their own nations interests. We have an entire forward operating base that's been overrun by stuff out of a Led Zeppelin song. Billions of dollars of resources that are either destroyed, or else in the hands of another nation. AND THAT'S BEFORE YOU MENTION THE LOSS OF AN ENTIRE SQUAD OF MUCK MARCHERS." He said in a half yell.

She listened to all of it with grim surety.

"Yes sir." She said simply.

"And it was all YOUR plan." He said. "YOU wanted the base reinforced once it was discovered. YOU advocated the use of the M.F.F.V.'s. YOU suggested sending a Muck Marcher squad. YOU recommended the Major to be the O.I.C. of the whole op."

"Yes sir I did." She answered.

"We thought you were trying to make up for that fuck up with the Chois and Sergeant Batista. Or that you were trying to prove that you weren't Krick's little lap dog." The General ranted. "And now we've got to explain to the president how we've completely FUCKED. THIS. UP."

"We've also likely ruined our diplomatic options with the Petravians." She said as she fought back a smirk.

She could see the General's ire rising at the comment.

"To say.... the least." He said, vein pulsing on his forehead.

"Sir." She began softly. "Are you aware of the concept of a poison pill? As it relates to hostile business practices?"

He deflated at the unexpected question. "What does that have to-" Then the realization hit him. "You..... you set this up? To make us look bad?" He said in a hiss. "Do you have any idea how many lives you just cost us?"

"Well the fight is still in its winding down phase, so I expect there will be a few more before its over. And I...." She shook her head. "I'll have to learn to live with that." Then she straightened back up. "How many Petravian lives did this cost SIR?" She asked. "Do you even know?"

"THEY STARTED THIS!" He yelled into his webcam.

"No." She said, a single finger held up. "No. They responded to unexpected intruders to their country, and they did it in an almost entirely pacifist way. None of our people were harmed during the attempted arrest by the Petravian patrol." She leaned forward. "It was OUR people who started the fight."

"AT YOUR SUGGESTION!" He snapped back at her.

"Partly." She admitted. "I did suggest that the Deep Strike Force might be a better option for our troops there due to their skills and equipment, but my primary reason was because they might resist the effects of a return trip more capably. I NEVER suggested using them as a show of force. Much less to walk through the door guns blazing."

She left out the part where she'd expected it though.

"Regardless. This fight is over. We now have one of the things you Pentagon Pilots love most." She said, not holding back with the jab. "Intel." She said. "You now know exactly what the Petravian military is capable of in a stand up fight. How they handle the different weapons systems and ground forces we use. Minus tanks, and fighter jets and things, but still. More importantly, you know that they are not to be handled lightly."

"We already knew that." The General said. "We weren't going to underestimate an opponent who has MAGIC."

"Weren't you though? Sir?" She asked. "Or have you forgotten that facility full of werewolves? Or at least I assume that its full of them by now."

He turned even redder at that. "That's classified Colonel."

"Oh I'm sure." She said. "And I sure as hell won't be the one to let the.... CAT... out of the bag on it. But it's still a colossally stupid idea. Grant was playing with things he had NO comprehension of. AND NOW we also have ACTUAL magic popping up all over the world. You can't tell me that was something any of us expected. The last thing the President needs is to have attention drawn to THIS operation."

She paused and smirked again at the General's growing agitation.

"But that's neither here nor there." She said. "You have.... a completely new set of problems in Petravus." She tilted her head a bit. "But these problems also present wonderful opportunities.."

"What are you talking about?" He asked with scorn.

"The kingdom of Petravus just won a battle against an unexpected and, according to what we will tell them, UNSANCTIONED enemy." She said. "It'll be a hard sell. But we now have the opportunity to... humble... ourselves to them. To make concessions. AND.... to let Choi look more and more like a hero, and also lead the people WE have over there now."

As she'd spoken she'd watched the general's face move from rage to confusion, to considering thought.

Good. She thought. *Things will be rough for a while. But at least this should loosen Choi's leash even more. And give the King some cards to play if he needs them.*

But neither of them were aware of the short, sweet, and violence inducing, conversation that a certain goddess was having with her favorite soon to be champion.

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James winced as a sand laden blade of wind dug into the meat of his shoulder as he made to close the last few yards of distance between him and his brother. Hot blood poured down the fur of his left arm as he narrowly deflected the attack.

"JOEY!" He yelled. "JOEY LET ME IN!"

He felt something, some unseen phantom of magical wind energy, grab at him like a massive hand and try pulling at him. He pulsed wind energy from his arms and struggled free from it.

He's in complete nuclear mode. He thought. *But holes in walls, smashed toys, and broken nails are nothing compared to this.*

"JOEY PLEASE!" He begged as he struggled against what felt like a rubber shield of whipping wind.

His skin burned where the sand blasted at it. His muscles ached as he struggled to maintain balance in his flight. He could feel the ache in his legs and knew that he was exhausting himself magically.

Suddenly, and unexpectedly, a dark and multi-colored shortsword flew up in front of him. The chain was no longer attached to it, and as James instinctively grabbed it with his right hand, he looked down and saw Amina quickly shuffling away in a crouch.

She'd given him the one thing that could defend her from the magical sandstorm.

Even as he wanted to thank her for the the unexpected aid, James cursed it.

No. He thought. *I can't use this on him.*

The sword yearned to pull James toward his brother.

But it can get me TO him. Just gotta move fast. Can't let it hurt him.

James flew up a few yards higher than Joey, letting the sword slice at the incoming defensive attacks, and used his wolf arm to continue fighting wind with wind.

Then when he was in a position that he thought would work, and right as he felt his left leg begin to burn in pain, James burst forward, letting the sword cut the magic in front of him as he did.

Something pierced him in the abdomen, a blade.... no... a spear of sand laced wind punched through him just before he slammed into his brother with his chest. The sword tumbled down to the sand below, intentionally discarded.

His hands shot up and clamped onto his brothers hands. An old signal that their mother had figured out with Joey years ago to let him know that they needed to talk to him, for just a few words.

Joey instinctively lifted his hands ever so slightly off of his ears and James pressed his mouth to the space. James worried at the blood around Joey's ears, and caked on his hands.

"I'm here Joey." He said. "I'm not going anywhere."

And Joey's hands slammed back onto his ears.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (257/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yoyq6q/wait_is_this_just_gate_256/)

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"Why don't you look for yourself soldier." He said. "I'd say she has it in hand."

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"Fast would be nice." The soldier said. "No more poking please."

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"Evening officer." Vickers said as he used his tongue to tuck most of the skittles into his cheek. "I wasn't speeding was I?"

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"You're gonna be worse than that if you don't move!" The soldier replied.

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"Because in about thirty seconds this is gonna be a crater." Vickers said as he gingerly slid down to the sand on his butt.

The Sergeant looked at him with wide eyes. Then he looked quickly up at the mortar barrel on the Miffy.

"Looks like about ninety degrees, don't it?" Vickers asked. "Plus or minus a few to adjust for wind and shit."

"You motherf-" The Sergeant began, then thought better of it and turned to his comrades. "RUN!"

The other soldiers didn't need to be told twice. They all immediately scattered and began sprinting.

Vickers groaned as he lifted himself back to his feet.

"Thanks for the lift guys. Definitely not injured or anything." He said. He took a deep breath and braced himself. "Fuuuuuck."

Then, despite all his pains and weariness, he began running faster than any of them. Faster by a large margin.

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Veliry had expected to impact the sand below, maybe even one of the soldiers or a body or something. She was more than a little surprised when she was caught by a pair of arms and a body instead.

"Veliry?" A familiar voice asked with concern. A voice that was NOT supposed to be here. "Ms. Veliry?"

She opened her eyes and confirmed the impossible.

"Joseph?" She asked weakly. "No. What are you doing here?"

Joey gasped as he saw her eyes open and heard her speak.

Then she groaned in pain as she was reminded of what had happened. Her hands shot to the hole in her stomach and came away bloody.

"Oh god." Joey said. "Ohhhh you're hurt. No."

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"No. No no no no." He said, tears flowing down his cheeks. "No. They hurt you."

"Joey." She said as she gripped the front of his robes weakly, leaving a bloody hand print there. "You have to go back." She shivered, as if cold. "Not safe here."

"But you're hurt." He said. "Gotta help. James would help. Mom would help. I'm here. I have to help."

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A small, blood soaked, hand rested on his cheek.

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Before Joey could say anything Veliry disappeared, her entire body seeming to phase right through his hands and leg, and down through the sand as she dropped out of sight.

Joey's eyes widened in confusion and fear as he quickly got on his hands and knees and began feeling around the sand.

"No!" He exclaimed, not understanding what had just happened. "No, Ms. Veliry! No no no no."

The wind began to whip around him wildly, kicking up sand, as he dug through the sand in a feeble attempt to find her.

"No. Come back." He said frantically as the wind around him began to pick up. "Don't leave. Not you too. Come back." He practically begged the uncaring sand.

Joeys breathing began to grow fast and ragged as his hands shot up to his ears and clamped down hard enough to dig his fingernails into his skin.

Over a nearby dune, a robotic body with a sword shaped hole in the front of its head lurched into view, a rifle held awkwardly as it approached in spastic steps.

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Joey landed on it in a pounce, not even realizing that he had been hovering some ten feet off the ground when he'd decapitated the machine. His hands slammed into the metal of the suit, palm first, in a rage. Each strike blasting holes into the machinery and the flesh it concealed.

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He didn't notice the small group of Petravian soldiers that climbed up the dune nearby to see what was happening.

He didn't notice that James was among them, carried by Amina and one of those soldiers in a daze, both of whom were casting healing magic on him.

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But Joey didn't hear that either, and didn't notice that the wind around him was intensifying.

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Suddenly the young, armored, elf archer was pulled forward and into the air where he was quickly pulled apart, as if by invisible blades made of sand and wind.

"Get back!" Amina yelled, just as something lanced out and pierced one of the soldiers near her in the shoulder. "Fall back."

"Amina." James said softly. She looked at him and saw that his eyes were locked on his brother. "Go."

"No James. We have to go." She said. "You're too hurt. I'm too hurt."

"No." He said.

He looked over at her as the sand around them began to move in the air.

She saw the mixture of emotions there and swallowed. There wasn't going to be any convincing here.

"Fine." She said. "But this isn't going to be like the elemental."

"What?" He asked.

"If you're going to plunge into certain death again. Then I'm coming with." She said firmly as she looked at the young man in the center of the maelstrom. "Besides. He's going to be my little brother too."

James didn't have the energy to argue. He just nodded.

"Thank you." He said as he focused what little energy he could on his own wind magic. "I love you."

Then the two of them began walking forward. With Amina holding James up and trying to heal his wounds, while James fended off his brother's magical storm.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (257/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yoyklc/wait_is_this_just_gate_256/) /
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"What?" He asked.

"If you're going to plunge into certain death again. Then I'm coming with." She said firmly as she looked at the young man in the center of the maelstrom. "Besides. He's going to be my little brother too."

James didn't have the energy to argue. He just nodded.

"Thank you." He said as he focused what little energy he could on his own wind magic. "I love you."

Then the two of them began walking forward. With Amina holding James up and trying to heal his wounds, while James fended off his brother's magical storm.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yqvznw/wait_is_this_just_gate_258/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (256/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ymba42/wait_is_this_just_gate_255/)

Writer's note: Nothing to see here [*beloved readers!*](https://i.imgflip.com/3tepfw.jpg)

Enjoy!!!!\~

"Wake up idiot." A familiar, let not quite right voice said.

James stirred, surprised at how little pain he was in.

His eyes opened, and to his surprise he.... wasn't..... looking up at the desert sky, or a tent, or into the sand. But, he wasn't blind either.

Instead, as he looked up he saw what looked like the most intense northern lights in the history of anywhere. Swirls of green, and blue, and red, and purple made vortexes and eddies of etheric light above him.

"There he is." Said the voice. "Good." Then James heard an odd kind of snapping noise. Like a snapping finger, only that wasn't quite right either.

He sat up and looked over at the source of the noise.

And immediately shuffled back in surprise.

"Yeah. Welcome to the shit show." **HE** said from several yards away.

James was looking at himself. Or rather, some older, alternate reality version of himself.

No.... that wasn't quite right. He was looking at.... three(?) versions of himself.

Front and center was the one that had been talking, and as he studied him he saw why the snapping finger sounded different.

He looked down at his own left hand and snapped the fingers there and sure enough it made same sound.

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"Yeah." The other **him** said. "Take it all in. Take your time. Definitely not in a rush."

The left side of this.... other James's face looked nothing like his. Where James had burns and scars on his face, this Other James had a section of flesh that looked to be made of the same kind of scales, albeit smaller, as Steve had. The lost hair on that side was replaced

with a shaggy grayish black mane that matched Steve too, if the lizard had been showing signs of aging. The eye on that side was human, but yellow in color. His face had lines that James wouldn't have for at least another ten years, or at least he hoped not.

James stood up as he studied the Other **Him**.

"Where am I?" He asked as he looked around. He also looked at the versions of him that stood behind the central one. "What the fuck is going on?"

"Long story there." The central **HIM** said. "No time. It's coming."

"What?" James asked. "What's coming."

"The catalyst." **HE** said as if that was an explanation. "The one that determines which path you go down."

The James that was to the right of, and behind, the speaker muttered something that James couldn't hear.

"Path? What? What catalyst?" James asked. "What are you talking about? What the fuck is that?" He asked, pointing at the hunched over, deformed, version of them both.

"You're at the camp. The FOB right?" Central **him** asked. "That's when this happened. You're doing the right thing. But it's a distraction. It's the BIIIIG players keeping you away from your job. YOUR ACTUAL JOB!" **He** used his hands to emphasize the word 'Big' as he said it. "Right now we're taking advantage of a little loophole to warn you."

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"Don't bother." **It** chided him. "Can't DIRECTLY contact past selves. Movie style rules. You know that."

"THEN TELL ME WHAT YOU MEAN!" He demanded. "What's happening?"

All three of the images of him looked around as the strange lights around them flared brighter and swirled faster.

"Too late." **HE** said. "You have to make a choice. It's about to happen."

"What's about to happen?" James asked for the millionth time.

"Choose life." The one to the left, who hadn't spoken and seemed the most like James, said with a soft smile. "It'll be okay."

"Kill." Said the one to the right, though it didn't turn to look at any of them.

"Angels and devils kid." Central **HIM** said. "No REAL right answer. But you have to save him."

"Save who?"

"And then you have to go back to your real job. The reason you were brought here in the first place." **They** answered, but the voice got quieter with each word, as if it's volume knob was being gradually turned down.

"SAVE WHO?" He demanded. "WHAT IS HAPPENING!?!?"

He couldn't hear them as all three of them spoke, even the right one turning so he could see its scarred, one eyed, hateful face.

But he saw the word, the name, **they** said.

"Jojo."

James felt his heart seize up at the idea that this "Warning" somehow involved his little brother.

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Pain erupted across James's mind as his ACTUAL eyes fluttered open. One of them didn't want to open the whole way, and that side of his vision was half-veiled in darkness.

Someone was slapping his cheek. The slaps sent cascades of pain across his face.

"JAMES!" Amina's voice said, though it was horse and broken by ragged breaths. "JAMES WAKE UP!"

"Amina?" He said weakly. "Wha-.... where?"

Then he saw her and he attempted to sit upright. But every muscle in his body screamed at him for even attempting it.

Amina was matted in drying blood and sand. Her armor was riddled with holes from bullets, and even a few jagged lines where ricochets or blades had rent it open.

"Amina? What happened?" He turned his head a bit and saw the Muck Marcher next to him as they lay among the mangled ruins of one of the camp tents. The Muck Marcher was laying with its limbs at odd angles, and its face plate was cracked. "Are you okay?"

Amina took a deep ragged breath and practically coughed out her answer. "No." She grunted. "Not really. But I'll live... I think." She grabbed

the front of his vest and braced herself. "Take a deep breath." She instructed him.

"What? Why?" He asked.

"Just do it. Trust me dear." She said as blood dripped from her nose.

James took a deep, exaggerated, inhale as if he was at the doctor's office.

At the apex of his breath Amina jerked him upright and James felt something moved in his chest, just under the ribs. He felt things shift around it as it was removed from his body.

"AAAAAAAGH!!!" He screamed as he clamped his hands, which had pain induced strength, on her shoulder and waist.

"I'm sorry." She said into his ear as she moved something from underneath him with a loud clanking noise, and lowered him back down.

"Was I impaled?" James asked in disbelief. Amina nodded against him. James took quick, short breaths. "Fuck." He said softly. "Shoulda left it in." He said as she lowered his head. "Medical classes later. If I live that long. Fuck."

"We can't stay here." She said. "We need to get back to the castle and to the healers. Before I can't move."

"What happened to you?" He asked. "Are you shot? You look shot. A lot.... Rhymes." He said in between breaths.

"They fired one of those thermo-berry rounds at us." She said as she pressed her forhead against his. James's eyes widened, at the realization that that was what the Miffy had fired. "I went a bit crazy because of it. Lead the survivors on a charge. Don't know how much I have left in me." She said as she lifted herself to a knee and grabbed the top and bottom of his vest.

James reeled at the idea of CHARGING the base.

"Amina. You said "get back to the castle'. What do you mean? That's weeks away." He asked.

"Veliry is here." She answered as she grunted and lifted him up into a fireman's carry. He'd have told her it was a bad idea, medically speaking, but he had more pressing concerns. "Said she had a shortcut. Brought more mages."

"Veliry?" He wondered. "She didn't bring my brother did she?" He asked.

"Joey?" She wondered in return. "No. At least I can't imagine she did. He must be back at the castle. Why?"

"Just wondering. Weird dream while I was unconscious." He admitted.

Then, as Amina turned and began trudging slowly towards where the Petravian troops were still streaming over the walls, they saw Veliry.

She was glowing like a star above the dunes, her hands held up above her.

Then the sky above her erupted in an explosion that James recognized from outside the walls of Jadesport, though it was smaller than those.

"Holy fuck." He said as he saw the display around Amina's side.

"Veliry." Amina said.

The flame and devastation of the thermobaric mortar round slammed into an invisible wall above Veliry like a sci-fi, space movie, force field. Veliry dropped a few feet lower from the impact, but then began glowing brighter as the fire above the shield intensified.

From where they were, none of them knew what had actually just happened. But everyone, even the Earth soldiers who weren't well acquainted with magic, felt the power being wielded there. Everyone in the base stopped fighting for a moment to watch in awe at the small mage.

And the catalyst that James had been warned about, began.

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Here it comes. Veliry thought. *If it's like the others, it'll detonate roughly one hundred feet above the ground. Create the feedback loop with its own heat and pressure energy. Use it's own power to fuel the shield against it.*

She felt the energy from the mages below flowing into her, actively now that some of the older mages had joined the group, and she put that into the shield too.

Unbreakable. She thought. *Like a mountain against a wildfire. Unmoved. Unbroken. Eternal in its silent power.*

Then the projectile, only a few feet long and maybe six inches wide, got to where she'd estimated it would go off.

She watched, in the same slow motion that she'd taught James to imbue upon himself, as it separated into four pieces with a pop.

Then a light so bright that she had to close those eyes shone out.

Fire, like nothing she would ever wield, like a fire elemental's core, burst out in a ring as the air inside expanded so rapidly she couldn't have seen it if her eyes had been open.

It hit the shield and she felt the raw strength of it and knew that it would break her.

She began to siphon off of that very strength, feeling the sudden wild intensification of the heat energy before her and using it.

UNBREAKABLE!

Her shield strengthened.

STRONGER.....THAN.....ITS OWN..... ATTACKER!!!!

Something below her made a pop noise that she couldn't hear so close to the explosion.

Something impacted her at the side of her stomach and punched through her and out the other side, just to the left of her belly button.

She felt a cold pain in her that temporarily distracted her.

She dropped several feet and felt the shield almost drop.

NO! She thought. No, demanded, of her mind. ***NOPE! NOT ALLOWED. SHIELD NOW! THIS SHIELD WILL HOLD!***

She gritted her teeth as she made a point of ignoring the cold spreading through her legs. She forced some of the energy flowing through her to her legs, keeping her aloft through the glowing tattoos there, even as she felt those same legs growing cold and numb.

UN.....BREAKABLE!

Then she felt the heat and pressure of the explosion soften, dissipating ever so slightly, and knew that the explosion was over. It had only been about five seconds. But the other explosions hadn't been very long either. And they hadn't been used against themselves like this one had.

"Fancy Earth weapons are nothing...." She said as she slowly reduced the energy going to the shield. "Compared.... to an Arch-Mage." She said as she felt herself shudder. "THE ARCH-MAGE!" She exclaimed in triumphant victory.

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From where he was bundled up, Driscoll watched with a smile as the little redhead began to falter, then fall.

He was surprised she'd held on as long as she had after taking the shot from Doc's pistol. He'd commend her if she weren't his enemy, and about to die.

He was a little annoyed as he saw several Petravian soldiers rush over to the downed suit and begin hacking and smashing at it with their stupid medieval weapons. But he also couldn't blame them.

Instead he began looking for other suits to use the new weapon on.

His smile turned to a scowl as he noticed that Rodriguez's suit was reading total destruction.

"How the fuck?" He asked as he began looking at the recording of what had happened.

"FUCKING CHOI!" He yelled into the silence of his helmet.

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Joey didn't see Veliry's herculean effort. He was still curled into a ball with his hands over his ears.

But he felt the crescendo of energy she had built around herself as she'd readied the shield. After months of learning and training under her that energy was as familiar to him as the sound of his brother's voice, or the smell of his mother's cooking. He recognized who it was just by the way it felt as it pulled from everything around the battlefield.

He wondered, even as he was having his melt down, what she could possible need all that energy for. But he was also smart, and realized that she must have been trying to stop the next attack. Probably a shield.

Reroute all powers to shields. He thought, and the thought actually helped calm him a bit.

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In his mind it was like a car hitting a pothole at highway speed. The sudden interruption not stopping what was happening, but definitely causing everything to stutter for just a moment.

Then he felt the power build up again, even higher now, as the roar of the thermobaric weapon reached its apex.

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As Joey reached out with his magical senses, training them even as he used them to try to distract himself from his own sensory overload. Focusing on the magic to aim his mind away from its own self destructive tendency to freak out.

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One second he felt his teacher, high in the sky and triumphantly empowered.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ypyn1x/wait_is_this_just_gate_257/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (256/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ymayvn/wait_is_this_just_gate_255/) /
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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ypyknh/wait_is_this_just_gate_257/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (255/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yldnom/wait_is_this_just_gate_254/)

Writer's note: Mr. Torgue would love this chapter.

Enjoy.

\~

Veliry picked herself up from the desert floor with a groan of pain.

Around her, other Petravian soldiers were shaking dust off of themselves and helping each other up. Others were looking around for their weapons or shields, or staggering toward the still noisy base that they had previously been besieging.

The gunfire they heard from inside the camp was no longer aimed at them, only occasionally striking them, seemingly at random. Instead they heard screams of rage, and desperate bursts of fire from Earth soldiers who were now fighting in close quarters with their own people.

But they all cringed and began scrambling when they heard the sound of whatever weapon had just struck their army for a second time now. None of them wanted to be in the open when it impacted this time. Some soldiers scrambled into the crater of the previous attack, burning their hands and feet on the hot sand and ash of their incinerated and pulverized comrades in a hope that the enemy wouldn't target the same area a second time.

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"Round up mages." She told the soldier. "Now!" The young Sergeant nodded, though she could see the fear in his eyes. Then she turned back to the mage. "No. If we run more people die." She said. She saw him turning to run away, ignoring her. She blurred over to his position and grabbed him by the hood of his robes. She spun him around and he beheld

her rage. Her eyes glowed, red on the left and blue on the right, her hand emitted sparks of building deathbolts. "We fight." She said in a tone that would have made Amina listen if she'd heard it.

The mage cowed and raised his hands while nodding emphatically.

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And only a little over a little over a quarter of a mile away, trembling in fear and confusion for his teacher, Joey watched the small arch-mage rise to the challenge.

But so did someone else. And they were not worried for the mage, but rather worried about the threat she clearly was to their side of things.

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But they'd had three Muck Marchers just outside of their tent. There was no way the locals could have gotten in. And they were in the middle of the FOB, surrounded by armed soldiers.

How had this just happened.

He jolted back out of his seat as he realized the implications.

The tent was breached. The controls were destroyed.

They had no air defenses, and the mortar was down. They'd only be able to use them if they sent people to man them at the vehicles. And he was one of only five people trained to do so.

Ridena had been one of the others.

He looked around the room at the devastation that had just occurred. He couldn't even see past the section of tent that had been crushed.

But there was blood oozing out from under it.

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"Come i-Bzzzt- Repe-SSSSS- ll Earth tr-**** come in." The familiar voice of the First Sergeant said, though it cut in and out and was almost drown out by the sound of the battle outside, which now made its way into the tent easily. "Repeat Sta-ZZZT- STAND DOWN!"

What? He wondered. *What did he say?*

"All Earth troops. -ZZZZZZT- down. Stand down now!"

Did we lose? He wondered. *But I just fired the mortar again.*

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She yelled as she stalked toward him, sword aimed at him like a pointing finger. Johansson stumbled back and fell back into his chair.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yoyq6q/wait_is_this_just_gate_256/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (255/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ylcc50/wait_is_this_just_gate_254/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Mr. Torgue would love this chapter.

Enjoy.

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Veliry picked herself up from the desert floor with a groan of pain.

Around her, other Petravian soldiers were shaking dust off of themselves and helping each other up. Others were looking around for their weapons or shields, or staggering toward the still noisy base that they had previously been besieging.

The gunfire they heard from inside the camp was no longer aimed at them, only occasionally striking them, seemingly at random. Instead they heard screams of rage, and desperate bursts of fire from Earth soldiers who were now fighting in close quarters with their own people.

But they all cringed and began scrambling when they heard the sound of whatever weapon had just struck their army for a second time now. None of them wanted to be in the open when it impacted this time. Some soldiers scrambled into the crater of the previous attack, burning their hands and feet on the hot sand and ash of their incinerated and pulverized comrades in a hope that the enemy wouldn't target the same area a second time.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yoyklc/wait_is_this_just_gate_256/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (254/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ykp1br/wait_is_this_just_gate_253/)

Writer's note: Anger can be a really good motivator for some people.

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One of the first things that any practitioner of magic learns, is that magic becomes whatever its wielder can imagine it being.

For most Petravians, or other peoples of their world, this meant things like fire, or wind, or moving stone and earth. For others it meant healing, enchanting, even things like flight, or the ability to focus their vision to see things otherwise invisible to them.

But, unbeknownst to most save the dedicated mages and scholars, magic extended much further than that into their day to day lives. It was a known fact that their entire world, and indeed even their very bodies, were infused with magic on an intrinsic level. But most people of the world were unaware of the implications of such a fact.

James and Amina's mutual friend, and one of James's first mentors in this world, Gixelle was even unaware of the fact that she was actually one of the strongest users of this nature. This was despite her self admitted lack of magical abilities otherwise.

James had simply thought of her as a barbarian, in the nature of his worlds games and RPG's. Someone who could, when necessary, override their body's preservation instincts in favor of pure, unbridled, rage. Amina would have called her a battle-rager. Something that James's little brother Joey would have equated an old viking berserker in their world.

The truth was simultaneously simpler, and more magical, in nature.

When Gixelle entered the state of mind she needed for battle, she envisioned herself as an unstoppable killing machine. A warrior, and a living weapon, incapable of being stopped by anything short of utter destruction.

This focus, this self image that she'd crafted as her warrior persona, unbeknownst to her, had utilized her magical energy in a way wholly unlike anything a mage like Veliry or Marcos could have ever imagines. And that was why they never had.

But in the moments after witnessing well over one hundred of her soldiers being annihilated by one of the Earth weapons in mere seconds, General, and Princess, Amina Petravius, of mindless rage and aggression that made all physical weakness cease to exist in her mind. And because magic is, at its basest level, a case of mind over matter; those weaknesses ceased to exist in the real world.

As the soldiers in the enemy camp opened fire upon her dazed, traumatized army, Amina charged at them. Shield raised in front of her and moving in a blur, sword at her side. She bellowed a scream of primal fury that made ears bleed as she unconsciously used her voice of command. It was a scream of anger, vengeance, and fear inducing mania.

Bullets punctured the steel and leather of her armor as easily as they ever had, but stopped as they embedded themselves in flesh that had magically hardened itself, causing the already slowed bullets to only barely penetrate her skin.

Despite her previously injured leg she moved toward the base at a sprint that would have shamed any Olympian athlete on Earth. Her strides carried her yards at a time and when she reached the enemy battlement she cleared it in a single leap, her sword flashing out to remove the heads of the two soldiers nearest to her as she did and her shield sending another flying.

Her landing was no thing of grace as she crashed into the sand on the other side and slammed into a soldier who had been carrying a box of ammo to the front line for his comrades. She toppled the young man and sprawled across him in the confusion. She never gave him time to recover, as her helmeted head slammed into his hard enough to crush his skull and splatter his blood and brains across the sand.

Bullets clanged and rang off of her shield and dug into the meat of her arm and ribs and legs as she scrambled to her feet and charged at the confused, frightened, men and women around her. Those men and women wearing uniforms nearly identical to the one her fiance had arrived in this world wearing.

She felt a note of pride as she saw some of her own warriors, their soot stained, sand and blood caked armor showing hints of crimson and gold trim as they charged recklessly and with fury through and over the enemy battlements. She saw, with the same enhanced vision that James used so well, dozens of them cut down by rounds of the Earth weapons.

But she also saw them, the wolves, the orcs, the humans, the occasional dwarf or other kinds of people that comprised HER people, tearing into the ranks of the Earth soldiers with a rage that almost matched her own.

As she spun, blade trailing blood as it left the waist of a now bifurcated riflemen, she felt a hammer blow to the back of her head and her helmet was ripped off of her by force. Hot, magically rich, blood streamed down the back of her neck as she staggered forward. But her consciousness never so much as wavered from the blow that would have killed a normal human. That would have killed any Earth born human.

Her left arm, her shield arm, twisted in a contortion that would have sent pain screaming through her under normal circumstances. Two more hammer blows were intercepted by it as it prevented any further shots from finding her. She reengaged the spin to get eyes on the assailant, only to see a massive, armored were-folk with the head of a lion lift the person up and rip their arm from its socket, sending their rifle spinning to the ground.

Then she saw a trio of the armored Muck Marchers standing near a tent and firing into her ranks of berserk soldiers. They stood near the entrance to a tent that looked to be full of machinery and computers that looked a lot like the Communication Array back at the castle.

She heard the sound of the Miffy firing its cannon again, though she still didn't know what that meant. But she did know that the sound had preceded the death of an portion of her army.

She didn't know what that tent held. But if it had three of the armored combatants defending it, then she was willing to bet that it was important.

She charged them, ignoring the rounds that all three of them began to fire at her as she raised her shield in front of her. She was too enraged to notice that one of the bullets punched a small, startlingly neat, hole in the edge of her shield as she did. It made no difference to her right now anyways.

She screamed again, voice of command still active, as she charged the alien defenders.

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James emerged from the mangled, tangled, wreck of the tent in a daze as he crawled over the twisted and bent metal and torn green canvas. A hand landing in something that looked like poor quality chili made him think it might have been the mess hall for the base. He licked some of the chili off his hand, oblivious to the grit of the sand in it, before moving on.

He didn't know where Vickers was. Or if he was even alive. Hell, he didn't know how HE was alive. They'd only been a few paces away when a brick of C4 had detonated. The fact that they weren't red jelly on the sand was nothing short of a miracle.

Everything hurt.

His head felt like someone had used it as a drum at a heavy metal concert.

His ears rang.

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And as his mind recovered from the sudden, unfathomable, violence he suddenly understood the rage that had driven the ranks of them on their near suicidal charge of the enemy base, the princess at their lead.

He felt that rage too.

His right arm began to flex and spasm and rise up in a clenched fist.

He felt, and saw through, the teeming masses that came from miles below him as they answered his call to battle.

He screamed from the pain of the newly recrafted flesh of his body straining against his enraged muscles as they fought to control the things he brought up from the depths of the Deep Dark.

He would show these invaders what REAL monsters looked like.

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First Sergeant Nguyen listened to the battle unfold as he sat on the sand, most of his body wrapped in spider silk, and surrounded by Petravian guards.

He heard the whine and boom of the M.A.M. Miffy fire and knew what would follow. He'd been in the room when the Major, who was lying next to him

only a few yards away and seething with anger, had given the order for what it would be loaded with.

He'd winced and sealed his eyes shut as he'd heard the thermobaric detonation some quarter of a mile away. He'd heard the Petravians wonder what the hell had just happened. And he had watched as one of them had climbed to the top of the dune, only to return a few moments later, with a haunted, shell-shocked look upon their face.

He'd heard the princess's scream of rage, and been surprised at its volume.

Then he'd heard the Miffy fire again.

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"Help me get my radio." He said, though it was hard to hear over the distant battle.

"What!?!?" One of the soldiers asked incredulously. "What did you say?"

Nguyen looked up at them, they had long pointed ears and a long pointed beard. They were also furious and had a spear leveled at his head.

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"Help me get my radio." He said again.

"No Nguyen." The Major said from next to him.

"Shut the fuck up." He spat at her. Then he looked up at the soldiers. "Help me get my radio. I'll order my people to stand down."

"No you fuckin won't!" The Major exclaimed.

The soldiers looked back and forth between the two of them.

"Look at her." He said. "She was the one who ordered all of this. Because of someone on the other side. On Earth." He wanted to kick at her, but he knew that trying to do so would just make him fall over too. "This was NEVER supposed to be the way this went. This has all gone off the rails. Let me try to fix it."

The elf soldier pressed his spear against Nguyen's throat, and he felt a trickle of blood there.

"Why should I trust anything you say?" They asked.

"Because you can kill me either way." Nguyen said firmly. "And you probably will. Even if this ends up with me in some kind of trial. But at least let me try to stop this."

He heard something from the radio on his chest. But it was under numerous layers of spiderweb and so muffled that he couldn't make it out.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ymba42/wait_is_this_just_gate_255/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (254/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ykn8so/wait_is_this_just_gate_253/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Anger can be a really good motivator for some people.

\~

One of the first things that any practitioner of magic learns, is that magic becomes whatever its wielder can imagine it being.

For most Petravians, or other peoples of their world, this meant things like fire, or wind, or moving stone and earth. For others it meant healing, enchanting, even things like flight, or the ability to focus their vision to see things otherwise invisible to them.

But, unbeknownst to most save the dedicated mages and scholars, magic extended much further than that into their day to day lives. It was a known fact that their entire world, and indeed even their very bodies, were infused with magic on an intrinsic level. But most people of the world were unaware of the implications of such a fact.

James and Amina's mutual friend, and one of James's first mentors in this world, Gixelle was even unaware of the fact that she was actually one of the strongest users of this nature. This was despite her self admitted lack of magical abilities otherwise.

James had simply thought of her as a barbarian, in the nature of his worlds games and RPG's. Someone who could, when necessary, override their body's preservation instincts in favor of pure, unbridled, rage. Amina would have called her a battle-rager. Something that James's little brother Joey would have equated an old viking berserker in their world.

The truth was simultaneously simpler, and more magical, in nature.

When Gixelle entered the state of mind she needed for battle, she envisioned herself as an unstoppable killing machine. A warrior, and a

living weapon, incapable of being stopped by anything short of utter destruction.

This focus, this self image that she'd crafted as her warrior persona, unbeknownst to her, had utilized her magical energy in a way wholly unlike anything a mage like Veliry or Marcos could have ever imagines. And that was why they never had.

But in the moments after witnessing well over one hundred of her soldiers being annihilated by one of the Earth weapons in mere seconds, General, and Princess, Amina Petravius, entered a state of mindless rage and aggression that made all physical weakness cease to exist in her mind. And because magic is, at its basest level, a case of mind over matter; those weaknesses ceased to exist in the real world.

As the soldiers in the enemy camp opened fire upon her dazed, traumatized army, Amina charged at them. Shield raised in front of her and moving in a blur, sword at her side. She bellowed a scream of primal fury that made ears bleed as she unconsciously used her voice of command. It was a scream of anger, vengeance, and fear inducing mania.

Bullets punctured the steel and leather of her armor as easily as they ever had, but stopped as they embedded themselves in flesh that had magically hardened itself, causing the already slowed bullets to only barely penetrate her skin.

Despite her previously injured leg she moved toward the base at a sprint that would have shamed any Olympian athlete on Earth. Her strides carried her yards at a time and when she reached the enemy battlement she cleared it in a single leap, her sword flashing out to remove the heads of the two soldiers nearest to her as she did and her shield sending another flying.

Her landing was no thing of grace as she crashed into the sand on the other side and slammed into a soldier who had been carrying a box of ammo to the front line for his comrades. She toppled the young man and sprawled across him in the confusion. She never gave him time to recover, as her helmeted head slammed into his hard enough to crush his skull and splatter his blood and brains across the sand.

Bullets clanged and rang off of her shield and dug into the meat of her arm and ribs and legs as she scrambled to her feet and charged at the confused, frightened, men and women around her. Those men and women wearing uniforms nearly identical to the one her fiance had arrived in this world wearing.

She felt a note of pride as she saw some of her own warriors, their soot stained, sand and blood caked armor showing hints of crimson and gold trim as they charged recklessly and with fury through and over the enemy battlements. She saw, with the same enhanced vision that James used so well, dozens of them cut down by rounds of the Earth weapons.

But she also saw them, the wolves, the orcs, the humans, the occasional dwarf or other kinds of people that comprised HER people, tearing into the ranks of the Earth soldiers with a rage that almost matched her own.

As she spun, blade trailing blood as it left the waist of a now bifurcated riflemen, she felt a hammer blow to the back of her head and her helmet was ripped off of her by force. Hot, magically rich, blood streamed down the back of her neck as she staggered forward. But her consciousness never so much as wavered from the blow that would have killed a normal human. That would have killed any Earth born human.

Her left arm, her shield arm, twisted in a contortion that would have sent pain screaming through her under normal circumstances. Two more hammer blows were intercepted by it as it prevented any further shots from finding her. She reengaged the spin to get eyes on the assailant, only to see a massive, armored were-folk with the head of a lion lift the person up and rip their arm from its socket, sending their rifle spinning to the ground.

Then she saw a trio of the armored Muck Marchers standing near a tent and firing into her ranks of berserk soldiers. They stood near the entrance to a tent that looked to be full of machinery and computers that looked a lot like the Communication Array back at the castle.

She heard the sound of the Miffy firing its cannon again, though she still didn't know what that meant. But she did know that the sound had preceded the death of an portion of her army.

She didn't know what that tent held. But if it had three of the armored combatants defending it, then she was willing to bet that it was important.

She charged them, ignoring the rounds that all three of them began to fire at her as she raised her shield in front of her. She was too enraged to notice that one of the bullets punched a small, startlingly neat, hole in the edge of her shield as she did. It made no difference to her right now anyways.

She screamed again, voice of command still active, as she charged the alien defenders.

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James emerged from the mangled, tangled, wreck of the tent in a daze as he crawled over the twisted and bent metal and torn green canvas. A hand landing in something that looked like poor quality chili made him think it might have been the mess hall for the base. He licked some of the chili off his hand, oblivious to the grit of the sand in it, before moving on.

He didn't know where Vickers was. Or if he was even alive. Hell, he didn't know how HE was alive. They'd only been a few paces away when a brick of C4 had detonated. The fact that they weren't red jelly on the sand was nothing short of a miracle.

Everything hurt.

His head felt like someone had used it as a drum at a heavy metal concert.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ymayvn/wait_is_this_just_gate_255/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (253/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yjmw3b/wait_is_this_just_gate_252/)

Writer's note: This is where things begin to go.... poorly.

Enjoy (?)

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Margaret Choi was there when the first of the wounded began to come to the castle through the passage her son had helped create.

"Alright." Ambassador Werner said as she helped her begin the process of learning the new method of healing people. "Imagine that feeling you get when you can feel a static charge building up but can't get it to leave. Then imagine you can focus that static on your hands."

Head Healer Shrend watched the two women, eyes glowing green as he studied the energy flowing through them as they attempted healing magic. He could see the steady, even flow through the Ambassador, weak though it was. And he could see faint sparks of magical energy flowing through Mrs. Choi, though they were sporadic at best.

Still, he was impressed by the depth of the energy in the healer from Earth.

Then one of the other healers, a young woman who was new to the castle staff, tapped his arm for attention. He leaned down to listen to her when she beckoned for his ear. A moment later he spoke.

"Ambassador, Nurse Choi, I'm afraid duty calls." He said with a slight bow of his head. "Please feel free to continue your lessons for as long as you like."

"Is everything okay?" Mrs. Choi asked. "That looked like bad news."

He nodded. "It was. Though it was also, sadly, expected."

"What's going on?" The Ambassador asked. "It isn't related to the Captain again, is it?" Mrs. Choi looked at her with a hint of scorn and concern at the question.

"I.... Am not allowed to say." Shrend said. "Now if you'll pardon me, I must go."

He wasn't surprised when both women followed him out.

They didn't get five steps before they saw the first of the wounded.

Ambassador Werner stepped out of the way as two of the ward aides carried a soldier past on a stretcher. The soldier breathed in a raspy gurgle as a faint hissing sound was heard from their chest.

"Wait, was that man was shot in the chest?" Nurse Choi said as she beat him to the injured man and began inspecting the small hole in their chest plate.

She pressed the man's head up and studied his throat for a moment. Shrend watched curiously for a few moments as she worked. He'd yet to see much of Earth's medical practices in action, save a few small things that the Captain had showed them.

She quickly reached a hand under the man's back and felt for a moment. She winced and pulled her hand back, inspecting it for a moment. It was covered in blood which she wiped off for a moment. She lifted the soldier up just an inch and looked at whatever had caused her to wince.

"That's an exit wound." She said with a look of confusion. Then she muttered to herself. "He's got tension pneumothorax." She pointed at one of the aides that had carried the man to the bed he was on. "Find me something pliable but non-breathable. Plus adhesive. Does this world have tape?" The young half elf nodded in confusion. "Go get it." She said in a commanding voice that allowed no questioning.

Then she turned to Shrend and he was shocked at the fury that burned in her eyes. Startled by the sudden shift in who was running the room he faltered back a half step.

"This man was shot by a firearm. What the hell is going on?" She asked. "Where's my son?"

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BOOOOOOM!!!!!

James flew like a bullet, his explosive propulsion sending the startled soldiers behind him flying in multiple directions from the blast he'd released from his feet.

He saw the glob of C4 in Vicker's hand as it pressed onto the face of the of the Muck Marcher's helmet and stuck into it.

Where Vickers had just come from, James had no idea. He also had no idea what had happened to the charred, bloody, ragged looking Navy SEAL. But considering he'd just saved him from having his head blown off, he could question it later.

He got his hand on the back of Vickers' vest, and his chain wrapped around the man's torso, just as the C4 had begun deforming on the Muck Marcher's helmet. With his enhanced vision he saw the armored combatant's hands already reaching up to try to do something about it.

He saw Vickers' eyes widen in surprise as he realized what James was doing. His rage and bloodlust traded in for confusion and what James thought might have been concern. He'd give him shit about it later if the two of them survived this.

Instead of blasting off again, since he didn't know what that would do to the explosive putty, James turned on his jets, and the two of them began rocketing away from the still airborne Muck Marcher.

Even as fast as James had managed to get them moving, they were only about ten yards away when James saw the faint pop of the detonator. The Muck Marcher was still scrambling at their face plate, weapon forgotten, when it happened.

Then the entire world seemed to explode behind them.

James and Vickers flew away in a screaming mass of chains and agony, taking out one of the tents in a heap of army green canvas and steel supports.

\------------------------------

Driscoll watched the progress of the battle through his suit's HUD.

He couldn't move, he'd been bundled up too tightly and too well by the mass of spiders that had engulfed him. Plus, he was missing an arm now.

But he could still see what was going on through the camera feeds of the camp, and of his comrades.

Every second his anger grew hotter within him, like a smoldering pit of coal in whatever was left of his gut.

Five was down. Suit destroyed and Shit-Can compromised. Chief Vickers had savaged her like some kind of barbarian version of one of the old Marvel movies' Captain America and Sub-Zero combined.

Carroll had died at the hands of the princess and whoever that little lightning girl was. Sword to the face. Quick, and likely painless.

Doc had had his head slagged by that same little redhead. He'd managed to get his licks in. But she'd basically fired his skull inside his own helmet with those weird bolts of whatever it was she was shooting. Then

he'd watched her use the same attack on Carroll. It had allowed the princess to get her finishing blow.

Another klaxon sounded and he pulled up Johnson's feed. He'd had Choi in his sights, literally. Then something... no... someone, Vickers specifically, had slammed into him like a comet. And then he'd...

Shit. Driscoll thought. *He was gonna martyr drop C4 on him to save Choi.*

But then he'd seen Vickers' face change as Choi somehow miraculously managed to pull him away out of nowhere.

Then Johnson's feed, and all his suit sensors, had disappeared entirely. Suit destroyed.

Four of his crew down in less than half an hour. Five counting him. Which, they might as well have at that point.

That couldn't be right.

They were the deadliest warriors/weapon systems on their entire world save for actual nuclear weapons. And they had just experienced the greatest combat loss in their force since it's inception nearly three decades earlier.

And it happened at the hands of people with swords, and shields, and fucking hocus pocus magic and spiders. He fumed in his helmet.

He was tempted to initiate the self destruct sequences on the downed suits, save maybe Five's since she was still technically alive. He did send a recovery signal to the Toolies in their tent for her. He had to try to save her at least.

He stared at the small little red button on his HUD, the one that would trigger every bit of ordnance the downed suits had to detonate at once, and he pondered activating it.

Then he had a better idea. Though, he wasn't entirely certain how feasible it was.

He shot a message to Rodriguez, who was stationed near the Miffy control tent to protect it. Rodriguez had been a high level programmer on the civilian side before his time in the armor had started. If anyone could do what Driscoll needed, it would be him.

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James and Vickers had both known what was going to happen when they'd heard the camp's mortar go off. Vickers had seen them in action several times, and James had seen them fire training rounds on an artillery range once. They both knew what they could do. The only question was what kind of ordinance it had been set to fire.

James would have tried to stop it, if he'd been able to.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yldnom/wait_is_this_just_gate_254/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (253/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yjmt3x/wait_is_this_just_gate_252/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: This is where things begin to go.... poorly.

Enjoy (?)

\~

Margaret Choi was there when the first of the wounded began to come to the castle through the passage her son had helped create.

"Alright." Ambassador Werner said as she helped her begin the process of learning the new method of healing people. "Imagine that feeling you get when you can feel a static charge building up but can't get it to leave. Then imagine you can focus that static on your hands."

Head Healer Shrend watched the two women, eyes glowing green as he studied the energy flowing through them as they attempted healing magic. He could see the steady, even flow through the Ambassador, weak though it was. And he could see faint sparks of magical energy flowing through Mrs. Choi, though they were sporadic at best.

Still, he was impressed by the depth of the energy in the healer from Earth.

Then one of the other healers, a young woman who was new to the castle staff, tapped his arm for attention. He leaned down to listen to her when she beckoned for his ear. A moment later he spoke.

"Ambassador, Nurse Choi, I'm afraid duty calls." He said with a slight bow of his head. "Please feel free to continue your lessons for as long as you like."

"Is everything okay?" Mrs. Choi asked. "That looked like bad news."

He nodded. "It was. Though it was also, sadly, expected."

"What's going on?" The Ambassador asked. "It isn't related to the Captain again, is it?" Mrs. Choi looked at her with a hint of scorn and concern at the question.

"I.... Am not allowed to say." Shrend said. "Now if you'll pardon me, I must go."

He wasn't surprised when both women followed him out.

They didn't get five steps before they saw the first of the wounded.

Ambassador Werner stepped out of the way as two of the ward aides carried a soldier past on a stretcher. The soldier breathed in a raspy gurgle as a faint hissing sound was heard from their chest.

"Wait, was that man was shot in the chest?" Nurse Choi said as she beat him to the injured man and began inspecting the small hole in their chest plate.

She pressed the man's head up and studied his throat for a moment. Shrend watched curiously for a few moments as she worked. He'd yet to see much of Earth's medical practices in action, save a few small things that the Captain had showed them.

She quickly reached a hand under the man's back and felt for a moment. She winced and pulled her hand back, inspecting it for a moment. It was covered in blood which she wiped off for a moment. She lifted the soldier up just an inch and looked at whatever had caused her to wince.

"That's an exit wound." She said with a look of confusion. Then she muttered to herself. "He's got tension pneumothorax." She pointed at one of the aides that had carried the man to the bed he was on. "Find me something pliable but non-breathable. Plus adhesive. Does this world have tape?" The young half elf nodded in confusion. "Go get it." She said in a commanding voice that allowed no questioning.

Then she turned to Shrend and he was shocked at the fury that burned in her eyes. Startled by the sudden shift in who was running the room he faltered back a half step.

"This man was shot by a firearm. What the hell is going on?" She asked. "Where's my son?"

\----------

BOOOOOOM!!!!!

James flew like a bullet, his explosive propulsion sending the startled soldiers behind him flying in multiple directions from the blast he'd released from his feet.

He saw the glob of C4 in Vicker's hand as it pressed onto the face of the of the Muck Marcher's helmet and stuck into it.

Where Vickers had just come from, James had no idea. He also had no idea what had happened to the charred, bloody, ragged looking Navy SEAL. But considering he'd just saved him from having his head blown off, he could question it later.

He got his hand on the back of Vickers' vest, and his chain wrapped around the man's torso, just as the C4 had begun deforming on the Muck Marcher's helmet. With his enhanced vision he saw the armored combatant's hands already reaching up to try to do something about it.

He saw Vickers' eyes widen in surprise as he realized what James was doing. His rage and bloodlust traded in for confusion and what James thought might have been concern. He'd give him shit about it later if the two of them survived this.

Instead of blasting off again, since he didn't know what that would do to the explosive putty, James turned on his jets, and the two of them began rocketing away from the still airborne Muck Marcher.

Even as fast as James had managed to get them moving, they were only about ten yards away when James saw the faint pop of the detonator. The Muck Marcher was still scrambling at their face plate, weapon forgotten, when it happened.

Then the entire world seemed to explode behind them.

James and Vickers flew away in a screaming mass of chains and agony, taking out one of the tents in a heap of army green canvas and steel supports.

\------------------------------

Driscoll watched the progress of the battle through his suit's HUD.

He couldn't move, he'd been bundled up too tightly and too well by the mass of spiders that had engulfed him. Plus, he was missing an arm now.

But he could still see what was going on through the camera feeds of the camp, and of his comrades.

Every second his anger grew hotter within him, like a smoldering pit of coal in whatever was left of his gut.

Five was down. Suit destroyed and Shit-Can compromised. Chief Vickers had savaged her like some kind of barbarian version of one of the old Marvel movies' Captain America and Sub-Zero combined.

Carroll had died at the hands of the princess and whoever that little lightning girl was. Sword to the face. Quick, and likely painless.

Doc had had his head slagged by that same little redhead. He'd managed to get his licks in. But she'd basically fired his skull inside his own helmet with those weird bolts of whatever it was she was shooting. Then he'd watched her use the same attack on Carroll. It had allowed the princess to get her finishing blow.

Another klaxon sounded and he pulled up Johnson's feed. He'd had Choi in his sights, literally. Then something... no... someone, Vickers specifically, had slammed into him like a comet. And then he'd...

Shit. Driscoll thought. *He was gonna martyr drop C4 on him to save Choi.*

But then he'd seen Vickers' face change as Choi somehow miraculously managed to pull him away out of nowhere.

Then Johnson's feed, and all his suit sensors, had disappeared entirely. Suit destroyed.

Four of his crew down in less than half an hour. Five counting him. Which, they might as well have at that point.

That couldn't be right.

They were the deadliest warriors/weapon systems on their entire world save for actual nuclear weapons. And they had just experienced the greatest combat loss in their force since it's inception nearly three decades earlier.

And it happened at the hands of people with swords, and shields, and fucking hocus pocus magic and spiders. He fumed in his helmet.

He was tempted to initiate the self destruct sequences on the downed suits, save maybe Five's since she was still technically alive. He did send a recovery signal to the Toolies in their tent for her. He had to try to save her at least.

He stared at the small little red button on his HUD, the one that would trigger every bit of ordnance the downed suits had to detonate at once, and he pondered activating it.

Then he had a better idea. Though, he wasn't entirely certain how feasible it was.

He shot a message to Rodriguez, who was stationed near the Miffy control tent to protect it. Rodriguez had been a high level programmer on the civilian side before his time in the armor had started. If anyone could do what Driscoll needed, it would be him.

\----------

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Wait, is this just GATE? (252/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yikr2z/wait_is_this_just_gate_251/)

Writer's note:

MORE WRITTEN SAKUGA!!!!!

Also, for those interested [u/Mycroft4114](https://www.reddit.com/u/Mycroft4114/) wrote a pretty cool bit of [side story](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yiha9s/a_gentle_stirring_of_the_breeze/) check it out.

Enjoy.

\~

Joey watched as the last of the first wave of reinforcements ran through the door with satisfaction.

"Is that it?" He asked as Sergeant Marius watched them disappear into the faintly blue haze of the passage.

"Aye." He said simply. Then he pulled his shield from off the ground next to the door. "Now I've got to see how the situation over there is. I'll be back in a minute." He waved to a soldier that was near the door out of the room. "Ready for a message Petir?" He asked. The soldier nodded.

And with that, the dwarf stepped quickly through the door.

"Don't sit right with me." Petir said from his spot near the exit as he shivered. "Goin' into a bottomless bag like that."

Joey looked at the passage in question. "Bottomless bag dimension." He corrected.

Petir shook his head and made a point of looking away.

Joey seized the opportunity and stepped through the door. He could deal with the consequences later.

There was the moment of vertigo that he knew there would be. Then he was standing on loose gravel and sand.

He quickly clamped his hands over his ears as he heard the cacophony of noise that was on the other side.

^("What?") A familiar dwarvish voice asked. But Joey couldn't hear them through his hands and the noise of what was going on. ^("The hells are you doin here? Go back boy!")

This was a mistake. Joey thought as he winced against the noise. *It's too much.*

Someone grabbed him by the shoulder and began pulling. It was the worst thing they could do at a time like this.

Joey shook them off and ran a few paces away, where he kneeled behind a rock. It was too loud.'

^("Mr. Choi! You got to go!") Marius tried to say to him. ^("It's not safe here. Plus I was ordered to keep you on the castle side. Get back through!")

There was an explosion followed by a series of rapid firecracker pops somewhere in the distance.

Joey looked that way, trying to quantify the overwhelming amounts of info flowing into his brain just from the sound.

Why did I do this? I knew what was happening here.

Then he saw familiar dark blackish blue bolts of lightning fly into the sky beyond one of the dunes. It was only a few small bolts, and only for a fraction of a second.

But it caught his focus.

Veliry? He wondered.

His curiosity clawed its way above his fear and confusion.

He shook Marius off without even realizing it as he jogged over to the dune to see what was happening. His hands still firmly clamped to his ears.

\------------------------------

Amina, her eyes glowing and her arm already sore from the pull of her shield, saw Veliry slam into the Muck Marcher like a magic wielding wild cat. She had just a moment of impressed awe as she saw the two combatants begin rolling through the sand, spraying gouts of flame and sprays of deathbolts out at random as the scrambled at each other.

Then her arm pulled itself into the way of another hail of bullets and punches from her current opponent and she was back into her own fight.

The first of the armored opponents had been an easy fight. She'd had the Prince of Eyes at her side at the time. His spider horde and her martial abilities had been more than a match for the singular Muck Marcher and

they had practically disassembled him before the spiders had carried him back into her army's midst, bundled like an insect.

But now she was on her own. Her own soldiers were making gradual, but frequently halting, progress around their melee. But she was surrounded by guttering flames, writhing masses of the Prince's spiders, and a seemingly endless cascade of incoming bullets.

She'd learned very quickly to keep the Army base, the FOB as James had called it, on her left. Her shield was to predisposed to protecting her from their fire, and having the base on her right had caused her to frequently spin unexpectedly. This had made openings that she'd only managed to close because of her own speed and skill.

The Muck Marcher wielded two knives long enough to be considered short swords, and would frequently sheath one in favor of a pistol very similar to James's.

They were faster on the draw than James was too. She'd learned that quickly as well.

On top of that they wielded their daggers as well as any combatant she'd ever faced. She doubted either of her brothers would have been a match for either of them in a one on one duel. Her older brother the crown prince would have only stood a chance because of his size and his spear's deadly enchantment.

As it was, she was finding herself hard-pressed as her own sword frequently bounced or slid off of the angular, remarkably hard armor of the odd opponent. Additionally this one had seen how she had dismembered its comrade and was doing everything it could to keep its paltry few weak points on the move.

Even with magic on her side, its reflexes were every bit as quick as hers were.

Their blades and her shield clashed in a violent fever of clangs and rasps as the two of them danced around each other in a match that was making her question Vickers' frequent claims of being one of his world's deadliest warriors.

But she had one distinct disadvantage over the Muck Marcher.

And just like they always seemed to in battle, it made itself evident at the worst possible time.

She brought her shield up, aiding its own enchanted desire to protect her against a combination of a stab from the Muck Marcher's blade, and a shot from its pistol in what James called hip-fire position.

She felt it's subtle tug backwards and knew that something was going to hit her somewhere else too. But the shield's semi-sentience considered the Muck Marcher's attack the greatest threat.

She felt the blade clang off of her sword's backhanded parry even as she felt the hammer blow of the pistol round on the shield.

Then she screamed through gritted teeth as something punched through the armor around her leg and lanced through her calf. She immediately felt blood pour down her leg in a steady torrent as she fell to a knee.

The Muck Marcher showed no mercy, and no more hesitation than she would have had the roles been reversed.

It's pistol raised up and aimed at her head even as it rushed at her with its blade held forward in a stabbing lunge.

Amina snarled as her shield raised itself to attempt blocking both.

She readied to roll out of the way.

Then a spray of black and blue bolts slammed into the side of the thing, scoring black lines into its strange armor and driving it back.

Amina saw Veliry several yards away, blood flowing from her nose and missing one of her ears as one hand blasted deathbolts into the Muck Marcher. The other hand was raised in the direction of the base, and she saw bullets sparking as they slammed into the faint blue shimmer of a magical shield.

The Muck Marcher's pistol exploded in its hand as one of the bolts dug into it, mangling the mechanical appendage in the process as they held their knife hand up in a feeble attempt to shield themself from the mage's onslaught.

Amina staggered up as and lunged at them with her sword.

The Muck Marcher turned just in time to see the tip of her sword find one of the blackened weak spots on its helmet.

She put every ounce of magically enhanced strength she had into the stab and was rewarded with a satisfying crunching noise before her blade slid into the opponent's face. It stopped before could go all the way through. She wrenched it out as she fell back to her knee.

Curiously, the Muck Marcher's arms shot to its sides, dropping its knife in the process, and locked there as its legs straightened and locked together. It fell to the ground looking like a corpse in a casket. She looked over at the one that Veliry had been fighting, which was now surrounded by soldiers attempting to carry it away, and it was in much the same state. Though, it's head was a mess of melted, smoking, metal.

"Took you long enough." She said to the small arch mage.

"Say that to my good ear princess." Veliry shot back with a grimace.

Amina nodded, then pulled one of the tourniquets that James had taught their healers to make from her gear and wrapped it around her leg,

snaking it under her armor in the process. Then she tightened it until it hurt, and felt the bleeding in her leg stop. She looked at the wound and saw a small, pinky thick hole in one side, and a thumb sized hole bursting out of the other. But it was what James had called a "through and through", and the bone wasn't broken.

In other words. It would hold.

"You alright?" Veliry asked.

Amina nodded. "The big guns. The ones James and Vickers were so worried about. They've stopped firing. I think that's a good thing."

"Is that what's making all those popping sounds?" Veliry asked.

Amina nodded, then used her voice of command to address the soldiers near the downed Muck Marcher.

"YOU MEN! Stay back from that for now. We don't know enough about them. It could still be dangerous. Give it a wide berth until the battle is over!" She ordered them. They looked over at her and one of them, an Orc Sergeant, nodded and began ushering the other soldiers away from it and back behind the mage near them so they could continue their advance.

Amina leaned on her sword and shield as she brought herself back up to her feet.

"Gods damn!" She exclaimed as she bent for a second, favoring the injured leg. "Agh! Newfound respect for Artair!" She said as she began moving again, limping as she did.

She stepped over next to the small mage and the two began advancing among the formations of soldiers.

"ONWARD!" She yelled at them. **"FOR THE KINGDOM!"**

Something made a loud whining noise before there was an equally loud -**BANG-** from inside the base. They both looked at eachother, curious as to what their enemies had in store for them now.

\----------

James had been, a touch, overconfident as he'd made a slow advance on the Muck Marcher.

He'd gotten excited about the fact that his reforged sword, at the end of his newly enchanted chain weapon, had apparently gotten some new habits from his enchantment. As such, he'd felt a desire to test its effectiveness.

It turned out, as he'd marched toward the Muck Marcher, that it was very effective.

The newly enchanted handle of his chain whip made controlling the chain with his wind magic significantly easier, and as such much less of an energy drain. So he was capable of multitasking a bit more easily.

The sword was apparently NOT a fan of letting anything shoot James and moved, with difficult to control aggression, between James and any bullets that might hurt him. It used the writhing, coiling, whipping chain as a vector for these interceptions, at times seeming to move around James in a blur as it protected him.

The downside was that the Muck Marcher, and whatever sensors and programs it had access to, had picked up on the habit very quickly. Any time James made to strike at the armored opponent they would fire off rapid bursts of fire at him that prevented the blade from striking, by forcing it to defend him.

It was a new quirk that he would need to work on controlling.

But at least he wasn't getting shot.

That had been.... what... several minutes ago?.... Several seconds ago?

Between his enhanced reflexes and the fact that battle was, just on principal, chaotic. It was hard to tell how long he'd been trying to bring the Muck Marcher down.

That had, unfortunately, allowed some of the other soldiers to join in on the fight.

James's chain and sword were a blurring tempest around him as he lanced out at the enemy combatants with as many magical attacks as he could manage. Though most of them were interrupted or even blocked, accidentally, by his own weapon.

Things had been getting a touch more out of his control than he'd wanted them to.

Then the FOB's central Miffy had fired its cannon.

He'd heard a moment of faint buzzing, and he thought he'd tasted ozone, though it was hard to tell with all the spent gunpowder in the air.

Then it fired, and the sonic boom of its projectile was deafening even by gunfire standards.

It felt like it had shaken his very bones.

Everyone in the current melee EXCEPT the Muck Marcher was stunned by the sudden violence against their ears and bodies. James had a moment, as he looked around at the soldiers shaking their heads, to regret not having put his earpro in. There was a loud ringing overlapping everything her heard.

No VA in Petravus. He thought sarcastically, just in time for an armor encased robotic hand to lift him up by his IOTBS's collar.

James wouldn't admit it later, but he squeaked in surprise as the Muck Marcher lifted him up and choke slammed him violently back into the sand.

As James, stunned from the impact, looked up at the barrel now aimed at his face he was surprised to see his sword sticking out of the Muck Marcher's left shoulder, it's blade sunken into the metal a good three inches.

"Smile and wait for the f-" The Muck Marcher began in a deep, gravelly voice before suddenly snapping the gun up into an aiming position.

A mass of scorched clothe and flesh slammed into the Muck Marcher in a flare of orange light that sent the armored opponent flying and made James and the other soldiers present cringe back from the light and heat.

James's enhanced vision showed him Vickers, in a rage that would have matched Gixelle, flying after the Muck Marcher even as they themselves flew back, their armor smoking.

The Muck Marcher that still had James's sword in its shoulder.

The sword that was attached to the chain in James's hand.

James grabbed the handle in both hands and focused his magic into it, willing it to return to him even as he saw the other soldiers around him getting their weapons aimed at him again.

The Muck marcher's flight halted in mid-air as the chain went taught. James used their weight and momentum to his advantage as it pulled him up off his back and onto his feet.

He saw Vickers reaching toward the Muck Marcher, his shield no longer on his arm and wondered what he was doing.

Then he saw the white lump in his extended hand.

Oh shit. He thought.

As he saw his blade finally pull free from the Muck Marcher's armor James knew what he had to do.

All his magical energy focused on his feet.

He beat Vickers to the punch, already doing what the SEAL said even before he'd had the chance.

"CHOI!" Vickers yelled as everything seemed to slow to an even slower crawl. "FLYYYYYY!!!!!"

BOOOOOOM!!!!

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ykp1br/wait_is_this_just_gate_253/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (252/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yiknbd/wait_is_this_just_gate_251/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Joey watched as the last of the first wave of reinforcements ran through the door with satisfaction.

"Is that it?" He asked as Sergeant Marius watched them disappear into the faintly blue haze of the passage.

"Aye." He said simply. Then he pulled his shield from off the ground next to the door. "Now I've got to see how the situation over there is. I'll be back in a minute." He waved to a soldier that was near the door out of the room. "Ready for a message Petir?" He asked. The soldier nodded.

And with that, the dwarf stepped quickly through the door.

"Don't sit right with me." Petir said from his spot near the exit as he shivered. "Goin' into a bottomless bag like that."

Joey looked at the passage in question. "Bottomless bag dimension." He corrected.

Petir shook his head and made a point of looking away.

Joey seized the opportunity and stepped through the door. He could deal with the consequences later.

There was the moment of vertigo that he knew there would be. Then he was standing on loose gravel and sand.

He quickly clamped his hands over his ears as he heard the cacophony of noise that was on the other side.

^("What?") A familiar dwarvish voice asked. But Joey couldn't hear them through his hands and the noise of what was going on. "^(The hells are you doin here? Go back boy!")

This was a mistake. Joey thought as he winced against the noise. *It's too much.*

Someone grabbed him by the shoulder and began pulling. It was the worst thing they could do at a time like this.

Joey shook them off and ran a few paces away, where he kneeled behind a rock. It was too loud.'

^("Mr. Choi! You got to go!") Marius tried to say to him. ^("It's not safe here. Plus I was ordered to keep you on the castle side. Get back through!")

There was an explosion followed by a series of rapid firecracker pops somewhere in the distance.

Joey looked that way, trying to quantify the overwhelming amounts of info flowing into his brain just from the sound.

Why did I do this? I knew what was happening here.

Then he saw familiar dark blackish blue bolts of lightning fly into the sky beyond one of the dunes. It was only a few small bolts, and only for a fraction of a second.

But it caught his focus.

Veliry? He wondered.

His curiosity clawed its way above his fear and confusion.

He shook Marius off without even realizing it as he jogged over to the dune to see what was happening. His hands still firmly clamped to his ears.

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Amina, her eyes glowing and her arm already sore from the pull of her shield, saw Veliry slam into the Muck Marcher like a magic wielding wild cat. She had just a moment of impressed awe as she saw the two combatants begin rolling through the sand, spraying gouts of flame and sprays of deathbolts out at random as the scrambled at each other.

Then her arm pulled itself into the way of another hail of bullets and punches from her current opponent and she was back into her own fight.

The first of the armored opponents had been an easy fight. She'd had the Prince of Eyes at her side at the time. His spider horde and her martial abilities had been more than a match for the singular Muck Marcher and they had practically disassembled him before the spiders had carried him back into her army's midst, bundled like an insect.

But now she was on her own. Her own soldiers were making gradual, but frequently halting, progress around their melee. But she was surrounded by guttering flames, writhing masses of the Prince's spiders, and a seemingly endless cascade of incoming bullets.

She'd learned very quickly to keep the Army base, the FOB as James had called it, on her left. Her shield was too predisposed to protecting her from their fire, and having the base on her right had caused her to frequently spin unexpectedly. This had made openings that she'd only managed to close because of her own speed and skill.

The Muck Marcher wielded two knives long enough to be considered short swords, and would frequently sheath one in favor of a pistol very similar to James's.

They were faster on the draw than James was too. She'd learned that quickly as well.

On top of that they wielded their daggers as well as any combatant she'd ever faced. She doubted either of her brothers would have been a match for either of them in a one on one duel. Her older brother the crown prince would have only stood a chance because of his size and his spear's deadly enchantment.

As it was, she was finding herself hard-pressed as her own sword frequently bounced or slid off of the angular, remarkably hard armor of the odd opponent. Additionally this one had seen how she had dismembered its comrade and was doing everything it could to keep its paltry few weak points on the move.

Even with magic on her side, its reflexes were every bit as quick as hers were.

Their blades and her shield clashed in a violent fever of clangs and rasps as the two of them danced around each other in a match that was making her question Vickers' frequent claims of being one of his world's deadliest warriors.

But she had one distinct disadvantage over the Muck Marcher.

And just like they always seemed to in battle, it made itself evident at the worst possible time.

She brought her shield up, aiding its own enchanted desire to protect her against a combination of a stab from the Muck Marcher's blade, and a shot from its pistol in what James called hip-fire position.

She felt it's subtle tug backwards and knew that something was going to hit her somewhere else too. But the shield's semi-sentience considered the Muck Marcher's attack the greatest threat.

She felt the blade clang off of her sword's backhanded parry even as she felt the hammer blow of the pistol round on the shield.

Then she screamed through gritted teeth as something punched through the armor around her leg and lanced through her calf. She immediately felt blood pour down her leg in a steady torrent as she fell to a knee.

The Muck Marcher showed no mercy, and no more hesitation than she would have had the roles been reversed.

It's pistol raised up and aimed at her head even as it rushed at her with its blade held forward in a stabbing lunge.

Amina snarled as her shield raised itself to attempt blocking both.

She readied to roll out of the way.

Then a spray of black and blue bolts slammed into the side of the thing, scoring black lines into its strange armor and driving it back.

Amina saw Veliry several yards away, blood flowing from her nose and missing one of her ears as one hand blasted deathbolts into the Muck Marcher. The other hand was raised in the direction of the base, and she saw bullets sparking as they slammed into the faint blue shimmer of a magical shield.

The Muck Marcher's pistol exploded in its hand as one of the bolts dug into it, mangling the mechanical appendage in the process as they held their knife hand up in a feeble attempt to shield themself from the mage's onslaught.

Amina staggered up and lunged at them with her sword.

The Muck Marcher turned just in time to see the tip of her sword find one of the blackened weak spots on its helmet.

She put every ounce of magically enhanced strength she had into the stab and was rewarded with a satisfying crunching noise before her blade slid into the opponent's face. It stopped before could go all the way through. She wrenched it out as she fell back to her knee.

Curiously, the Muck Marcher's arms shot to its sides, dropping its knife in the process, and locked there as its legs straightened and locked together. It fell to the ground looking like a corpse in a casket. She looked over at the one that Veliry had been fighting, which was now surrounded by soldiers attempting to carry it away, and it was in much the same state. Though, it's head was a mess of melted, smoking, metal.

"Took you long enough." She said to the small arch mage.

"Say that to my good ear princess." Veliry shot back with a grimace.

Amina nodded, then pulled one of the tourniquets that James had taught their healers to make from her gear and wrapped it around her leg, snaking it under her armor in the process. Then she tightened it until it hurt, and felt the bleeding in her leg stop. She looked at the wound and saw a small, pinky thick hole in one side, and a thumb sized hole bursting out of the other. But it was what James had called a "through and through", and the bone wasn't broken.

In other words. It would hold.

"You alright?" Veliry asked.

Amina nodded. "The big guns. The ones James and Vickers were so worried about. They've stopped firing. I think that's a good thing."

"Is that what's making all those popping sounds?" Veliry asked.

Amina nodded, then used her voice of command to address the soldiers near the downed Muck Marcher.

"YOU MEN! Stay back from that for now. We don't know enough about them. It could still be dangerous. Give it a wide berth until the battle is over!" She ordered them. They looked over at her and one of them, an Orc Sergeant, nodded and began ushering the other soldiers away from it and back behind the mage near them so they could continue their advance.

Amina leaned on her sword and shield as she brought herself back up to her feet.

"Gods damn!" She exclaimed as she bent for a second, favoring the injured leg. "Agh! Newfound respect for Artair!" She said as she began moving again, limping as she did.

She stepped over next to the small mage and the two began advancing among the formations of soldiers.

"ONWARD!" She yelled at them. **"FOR THE KINGDOM!"**

Something made a loud whining noise before there was an equally loud -**BANG-** from inside the base. They both looked at eachother, curious as to what their enemies had in store for them now.

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James had been, a touch, overconfident as he'd made a slow advance on the Muck Marcher.

He'd gotten excited about the fact that his reforged sword, at the end of his newly enchanted chain weapon, had apparently gotten some new habits from his enchantment. As such, he'd felt a desire to test its effectiveness.

It turned out, as he'd marched toward the Muck Marcher, that it was very effective.

The newly enchanted handle of his chain whip made controlling the chain with his wind magic significantly easier, and as such much less of an energy drain. So he was capable of multitasking a bit more easily.

The sword was apparently NOT a fan of letting anything shoot James and moved, with difficult to control aggression, between James and any bullets that might hurt him. It used the writhing, coiling, whipping chain as a vector for these interceptions, at times seeming to move around James in a blur as it protected him.

The downside was that the Muck Marcher, and whatever sensors and programs it had access to, had picked up on the habit very quickly. Any time James made to strike at the armored opponent they would fire off rapid bursts of fire at him that prevented the blade from striking, by forcing it to defend him.

It was a new quirk that he would need to work on controlling.

But at least he wasn't getting shot.

That had been.... what... several minutes ago?.... Several seconds ago?

Between his enhanced reflexes and the fact that battle was, just on principal, chaotic. It was hard to tell how long he'd been trying to bring the Muck Marcher down.

That had, unfortunately, allowed some of the other soldiers to join in on the fight.

James's chain and sword were a blurring tempest around him as he lanced out at the enemy combatants with as many magical attacks as he could manage. Though most of them were interrupted or even blocked, accidentally, by his own weapon.

Things had been getting a touch more out of his control than he'd wanted them to.

Then the FOB's central Miffy had fired its cannon.

He'd heard a moment of faint buzzing, and he thought he'd tasted ozone, though it was hard to tell with all the spent gunpowder in the air.

Then it fired, and the sonic boom of its projectile was deafening even by gunfire standards.

It felt like it had shaken his very bones.

Everyone in the current melee EXCEPT the Muck Marcher was stunned by the sudden violence against their ears and bodies. James had a moment, as he looked around at the soldiers shaking their heads, to regret not having

put his earpro in. There was a loud ringing overlapping everything her heard.

No VA in Petravus. He thought sarcastically, just in time for an armor encased robotic hand to lift him up by his IOTBS's collar.

James wouldn't admit it later, but he squeaked in surprise as the Muck Marcher lifted him up and choke slammed him violently back into the sand.

As James, stunned from the impact, looked up at the barrel now aimed at his face he was surprised to see his sword sticking out of the Muck Marcher's left shoulder, it's blade sunken into the metal a good three inches.

"Smile and wait for the f-" The Muck Marcher began in a deep, gravelly voice before suddenly snapping the gun up into an aiming position.

A mass of scorched clothe and flesh slammed into the Muck Marcher in a flare of orange light that sent the armored opponent flying and made James and the other soldiers present cringe back from the light and heat.

James's enhanced vision showed him Vickers, in a rage that would have matched Gixelle, flying after the Muck Marcher even as they themselves flew back, their armor smoking.

The Muck Marcher that still had James's sword in its shoulder.

The sword that was attached to the chain in James's hand.

James grabbed the handle in both hands and focused his magic into it, willing it to return to him even as he saw the other soldiers around him getting their weapons aimed at him again.

The Muck marcher's flight halted in mid-air as the chain went taught. James used their weight and momentum to his advantage as it pulled him up off his back and onto his feet.

He saw Vickers reaching toward the Muck Marcher, his shield no longer on his arm and wondered what he was doing.

Then he saw the white lump in his extended hand.

Oh shit. He thought.

As he saw his blade finally pull free from the Muck Marcher's armor James knew what he had to do.

All his magical energy focused on his feet.

He beat Vickers to the punch, already doing what the SEAL said even before he'd had the chance.

"CHOI!" Vickers yelled as everything seemed to slow to an even slower crawl. "FLYYYYYY!!!!!"

BOOOOOOM!!!!

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ykn8so/wait_is_this_just_gate_253/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (251/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yg1uls/wait_is_this_just_gate_250/)

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Veliry was there when the Earth soldiers struck out with their first gunshots.

She saw, for the first time since the Grabber camp, just what a firearm could do to flesh during combat.

She knew from the handful of soldiers and the two mages that had helped her set up their side of the passage door that James and Amina had warned the soldiers and mages present of what to do to protect the troops from the incoming barrage. Still, she saw just how deadly the projectiles were in spite of their attempts.

When the soldiers in the camp opened fire on the Petravian formations, she watched as dozens of soldiers fell, their positions putting them outside of the nearby mage's protective abilities, or as those abilities proved not strong enough to stop the incoming bullets.

She saw James fly up over the battle, and out of the way of the incoming volley, even as she saw Amina's left arm move in a blur of speed as her shield moved itself between her and the incoming attack. She saw what had to have been one of the twelve guardians of the Deep Dark as they staggered back, a wall of webs and spiders forming a half shell around them as they did.

Then something much larger than any of the firearms below began to make a long, drawn out tearing sound that made the air vibrate. She saw James, eyes glowing, emit an explosion and blast his way out of the path of something she couldn't see until her own eyes began glowing as well. Then there was a stutter in the tearing sound, followed by a massive explosion somewhere in the distance, followed by a rapid series of what sounded like gunshots, occurring rapidly and without rhythm.

Then two other things began to make similar ripping noises, and James was moving again.

She looked back down and saw the mages below still attempting to protect the advancing soldiers around them. The first of the archers, hiding behind a dune, had begun firing. A cloud of arrows arced up over the small skirmish of soldiers below and toward the battlements of the Earth camp.

Several odd looking, strangely angular, armored warrior rapidly closed the distance between the camp and where Amina and the guardian were. They ignored the hail of arrows and even the stray rounds from their own camp, each of which bounced off of their armor with as much effect as hail stones. One of them impacted Amina's shield, charging at her like a bull, and sent the princess flying backwards several yards where she skidded to a halt.

The other, did something much more devastating.

They stopped just short of the defensive sphere that the guardian had crafted around himself, then touched something on each of their arms. Then they held their hands up with their middle fingers extended, in a gesture that James had taught her was an insult.

Sprays of thick brown fluid erupted from a set of tubes under their wrists. Something sparked, and the guardian and his spiders were engulfed in flames.

She heard him scream in rage and pain even as he disappeared behind the inferno. But she noticed that the spider swarm around the area didn't cease its movements, or lose cohesion.

There was another explosion, like the one before, followed by the same rapid popping. She looked up and saw James still flying around, using his explosions for rapid evasion as clouds of massive bullets attempted to intercept him.

More Petravian soldiers fell, though in smaller numbers now, as they figured out where the weak points in their magical defenses were and adjusted to get behind them.

Then she saw the armored warrior with the flames turn to look toward Amina, who was desperately fending off the other armored warrior while also having to avoid incoming fire.

Veliry flew from her position so fast that she left a trail of sand clouds behind her, her robes fluttering as she did.

The armored warrior sensed her approach somehow and turned to aim its flame weapons at her as she flew. Two gouts of flame sprayed out at her in a torrent, their fuel already ignited by the current inferno. These flames were met by a blast of compressed air that parted them before her like fog before Veliry's hand slammed into the warriors helmet, black and blue lightning bolts spraying into it from point blank range as she used her momentum to flip over and cling to its back.

The two of them began to roll and fight like cats on top of the sand, ashed webbing and scorched spiders.

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Faster. Must go faster. James thought as he dodged another cloud of the angry hornets that were the Miffy's projectiles. *Vickers. You dick.*

He knew the plan now. He'd flown close enough to the second one when it had destroyed itself.

Vickers, in his Navy SEAL stealthiness, had somehow rigged the Miffy's with rounds from his fire suppression launcher. He'd gotten the rounds into the cannons on top of the Miffy's and secured them well enough that they'd stay there even as the weapons spun up. Then they would either get damaged enough, or heated up enough by the barrels, to detonate. The resulting cloud of condensed, super cool, gases would cause an immediate failure in the extremely hot barrels.

But it wasn't an instant thing. The first truck had fired three, "Die! Motherfucker! Die!" long bursts at him before it had destroyed itself.

And he'd counted twelve of the things. They'd been re-positioned since his last flight. They weren't in the loose ring they'd been in before. Instead they'd been arrayed in two large arcs on the side of the camp AWAY from the opening to the desert. Where an approaching army wouldn't be able to get at them without dealing with the camp itself.

The only upside to their new formation, was that it meant James had one direction he didn't have to worry about them firing from.

The down side was that that side had an Army base, and the Petravian army launching arrows in high arcs.

He dodged again, just in time for another Miffy to detonate, though this time it did it without cooking off its ammo stores.

Then as he hovered, waiting for the next intercepting volley, something slammed into his back. The plate in his IOTBS stopped it. But it still knocked the wind out of him and made him falter in his flight.

He wanted to look to see what had happened when he heard a Miffy fire and had to dodge.

He decided to meet the two decisions in the middle.

James released his flight spell, and instead reached a hand up above him and emitted an explosion that shot him at the ground like a bullet. His other hand went to the chain wrapped around his torso and found the hook clip at the end.

He didn't know if any of the Earth soldiers had figured out magic yet. But he had a feeling that not many had. And even if they had, he had a feeling he was significantly better at it than they were. As such, he

reckoned that his sword wouldn't be doing too much intercepting in this fight. So he decided to use it in a new way.

He fastened the hook clip at the end of the chain into the loop at the end of his sword's pommel.

Then just as he impacted the ground, kicking up a cloud of sand as he did, he grabbed the handle of the chain and began unwinding it with his wind magic.

A figure, obscured by the sand, raised their weapon and fired at him, creating three gunshot flashes as the expanding gas cleared the sand somewhat. James moved to dodge when something blurred into his view and intercepted the three rounds with lightning speed that he couldn't match even with his enhanced reflexes.

Changes to the original pattern. He remembered as the newly reforged Mage's blade, now the Dark Mage's blade in honor of the nature of its reforging, flashed forward at the end of his wind chain.

The figure in the rapidly clearing sand flinched as it realized what had happened. James saw a glint of dark blue and black power armor and knew that his opponent was one of the Muck Marchers.

Neither of them hesitated.

The Muck Marcher's weapon began barking rapidly even as James's chain and sword began to move around him in a rapid whirlwind of dark, multi-colored, steel and wind magic.

James began to advance on the armored opponent in the middle of its own camp.

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"Motherfucker!" Vickers' armored opponent cursed as they reeled from the surprise counter to their burst of shots.

Vickers ripped the now half scorched ghillie cloak from his shoulders in a flourish as he turned around, grabbing his shield off his back with his other hand as he did.

Opposite him, now with only half their right arm, was the Muck Marcher that had shot at him. Their rifle lay in pieces on the ground, its barrel shattered and melted in some places from where its round had been sent back at it, faster and hotter than they'd left it.

The impacts had felt like hammer blows to his back, the caliber of the rifle being much larger than his pistol had been during his tests of the shield.

But he'd played baseball as a kid. He knew that when you got beaned you didn't show any pain. That was how you told the pitcher they threw like a little bitch.

"YOU MOTHERFUCKER!" The Muck Marcher repeated as they began running at him.

Wrong choice. He thought as he charged them right back. *I already know what it does in THIS situation.*

Vickers pressed his broken hand into the back of the shield, wincing at the ache there just as the Muck Marcher's fist impacted the shield.

There was another flare of orange light and heat.

Vickers smiled as he heard the Muck Marcher scream in surprise.

Then, with the fight now firmly in his favor, he was on them.

Before the armored behemoth could even land, Vickers was on top of them. His magically enhanced speed, coupled with his adrenaline enhanced battle focus allowing him to almost beat them to their own impact site.

The Muck Marcher didn't even have a chance to interpret the confusing array of information on their HUD before an icy, already broken, fist impacted their smoking armor like a gunshot.

\------------------------

Five reached up in desperation, both good hand and amputated arm reaching up in a feeble attempt to halt the assault.

Then the shield slammed into her chest and flared to life again, heating her armor even as it drove her deeper into the sand.

The fist followed it even before the sand had had a chance to settle and slammed her chest as well, chilling it to freezing temperature in a heartbeat.

Her suit began to flash warnings of impact damage and temperature fluctuations. And that was on top of the warnings for her damaged arm and the internal bleeding that her can was trying to compete with from her two separate flights.

Another shield bash. Followed by another punch.

Then again.

And again in a rapid staccato that seemed to grow faster and more violent with every second.

The sand around her began to melt from the heat before cooling and exploding from the cold. Then a few impacts later it would do it again.

Something cracked with a horrible crunching noise as she felt wind on her face. Her HUD darkened on the left side as she felt some of its LED's fall on her cheek like bits of dirt.

And he still wasn't stopping. Impact after impact rained down upon her like an artillery barrage of fire and ice.

For the first time in years. Since her first year in the armor, while she was still getting used to her newfound abilities.

For the first time in almost two decades, Five felt fear.

It was quickly replaced by pain as some part of her torso armor finally failed and allowed the angry SEAL into her domain. Magical Fire erupted within the suit, melting electrical components, medical tubing, and what little flesh she still had left.

Then cold, deeper than any arctic shelf she'd ever walked beneath, followed as she felt something crunch into the housing that held all her vital organs. She felt something in there crush as she suddenly struggled to breath.

She screamed in a horse croaking voice, and the only reason Vickers heard it was because there was daylight coming through a crack in her visor.

Then, miracle of miracles, just as she thought she was about to die. The impacts stopped.

Her HUD stuttered with static and occasionally went dark. But in the brief moments where it showed her display she saw the Chief stand up over her, shield on his left arm, right hand hanging in a mangled mess of ice and blood.

And he began to walk away.

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Vickers looked down at the crushed, smoking, glassed over wreck of a Muck Marcher with anger, and more than a little bit of disgust.

Their chest armor was rent open and caved in from where he'd struck it. Their Helmet was half crushed and had a massive hole where his fist had managed to punch through the heat strained material.

They were dug several feet into the sand, which had fused and cracked several times over from his assault on them. This led him to notice that his pants were burned off from the knees down and his legs were red and burned where they hadn't sunk into the sand beside the armored opponent's body.

Something smelled like shit and meat that was on the verge of spoiling.

"All that armor and you can't even handle body shots." He said as he stepped on the things leg to get out of the crater and begin walking away.

He looked at the Miffy that was nearby. The one that the now smoldering Muck Marcher had been on the verge of inspecting. It hadn't fired the entire time he'd been fighting. Yet as he looked around and the rest of the battle came back into view, he saw that Choi had to have flown at least a bit. A little less than a quarter mile away another one of the Miffy's was on fire, its ammo cooking off from what had to have been its barrels exploding.

He looked back at the one next to them. He wasn't one to leave a job half finished.

Setting the shield on his back for a moment, he used his good hand to fish around in his bag again.

He made a point of ignoring the pain in his right hand. He could see the black and blue flesh under the layer of ice. Could see the bits of metal, and whatever else the Muck Marcher had been made of, sticking in between a pair of knuckles. It had blood frozen onto it.

He'd deal with that later. Just bad luck that it was his right hand.

After a few moments he found what he wanted.

He tucked the small white brick under his right arm as he grabbed his shield again.

Then the one Miffy that he hadn't been able to get to, the one in the center of the camp with a magnetically accelerated mortar, fired.

ZZZZZZZZPHUMPF! BANG!

Vickers saw the small vapor cone as the round immediately broke the sound barrier upon exiting the barrier.

"Shit." He said.

He looked back at the Miffy he'd been on the verge of destroying, and decided that maybe that could remain half finished for now.

Now he had a slightly more important target to deal with.

He began to run.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yjmw3b/wait_is_this_just_gate_252/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (251/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yg1rf2/wait_is_this_just_gate_250/) /
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Faster. Must go faster. James thought as he dodged another cloud of the angry hornets that were the Miffy's projectiles. *Vickers. You dick.*

He knew the plan now. He'd flown close enough to the second one when it had destroyed itself.

Vickers, in his Navy SEAL stealthiness, had somehow rigged the Miffy's with rounds from his fire suppression launcher. He'd gotten the rounds into the cannons on top of the Miffy's and secured them well enough that they'd stay there even as the weapons spun up. Then they would either get damaged enough, or heated up enough by the barrels, to detonate. The resulting cloud of condensed, super cool, gases would cause an immediate failure in the extremely hot barrels.

But it wasn't an instant thing. The first truck had fired three, "Die! Motherfucker! Die!" long bursts at him before it had destroyed itself.

And he'd counted twelve of the things. They'd been re-positioned since his last flight. They weren't in the loose ring they'd been in before. Instead they'd been arrayed in two large arcs on the side of the camp AWAY from the opening to the desert. Where an approaching army wouldn't be able to get at them without dealing with the camp itself.

The only upside to their new formation, was that it meant James had one direction he didn't have to worry about them firing from.

The down side was that that side had an Army base, and the Petravian army launching arrows in high arcs.

He dodged again, just in time for another Miffy to detonate, though this time it did it without cooking off its ammo stores.

Then as he hovered, waiting for the next intercepting volley, something slammed into his back. The plate in his IOTBS stopped it. But it still knocked the wind out of him and made him falter in his flight.

He wanted to look to see what had happened when he heard a Miffy fire and had to dodge.

He decided to meet the two decisions in the middle.

James released his flight spell, and instead reached a hand up above him and emitted an explosion that shot him at the ground like a bullet. His other hand went to the chain wrapped around his torso and found the hook clip at the end.

He didn't know if any of the Earth soldiers had figured out magic yet. But he had a feeling that not many had. And even if they had, he had a feeling he was significantly better at it than they were. As such, he reckoned that his sword wouldn't be doing too much intercepting in this fight. So he decided to use it in a new way.

He fastened the hook clip at the end of the chain into the loop at the end of his sword's pommel.

Then just as he impacted the ground, kicking up a cloud of sand as he did, he grabbed the handle of the chain and began unwinding it with his wind magic.

A figure, obscured by the sand, raised their weapon and fired at him, creating three gunshot flashes as the expanding gas cleared the sand somewhat. James moved to dodge when something blurred into his view and intercepted the three rounds with lightning speed that he couldn't match even with his enhanced reflexes.

Changes to the original pattern. He remembered as the newly reforged Mage's blade, now the Dark Mage's blade in honor of the nature of its reforging, flashed forward at the end of his wind chain.

The figure in the rapidly clearing sand flinched as it realized what had happened. James saw a glint of dark blue and black power armor and knew that his opponent was one of the Muck Marchers.

Neither of them hesitated.

The Muck Marcher's weapon began barking rapidly even as James's chain and sword began to move around him in a rapid whirlwind of dark, multi-colored, steel and wind magic.

James began to advance on the armored opponent in the middle of its own camp.

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"Motherfucker!" Vickers' armored opponent cursed as they reeled from the surprise counter to their burst of shots.

Vickers ripped the now half scorched ghillie cloak from his shoulders in a flourish as he turned around, grabbing his shield off his back with his other hand as he did.

Opposite him, now with only half their right arm, was the Muck Marcher that had shot at him. Their rifle lay in pieces on the ground, its barrel shattered and melted in some places from where its round had been sent back at it, faster and hotter than they'd left it.

The impacts had felt like hammer blows to his back, the caliber of the rifle being much larger than his pistol had been during his tests of the shield.

But he'd played baseball as a kid. He knew that when you got beaned you didn't show any pain. That was how you told the pitcher they threw like a little bitch.

"YOU MOTHERFUCKER!" The Muck Marcher repeated as they began running at him.

Wrong choice. He thought as he charged them right back. *I already know what it does in THIS situation.*

Vickers pressed his broken hand into the back of the shield, wincing at the ache there just as the Muck Marcher's fist impacted the shield.

There was another flare of orange light and heat.

Vickers smiled as he heard the Muck Marcher scream in surprise.

Then, with the fight now firmly in his favor, he was on them.

Before the armored behemoth could even land, Vickers was on top of them. His magically enhanced speed, coupled with his adrenaline enhanced battle focus allowing him to almost beat them to their own impact site.

The Muck Marcher didn't even have a chance to interpret the confusing array of information on their HUD before an icy, already broken, fist impacted their smoking armor like a gunshot.

\-------------------------

Five reached up in desperation, both good hand and amputated arm reaching up in a feeble attempt to halt the assault.

Then the shield slammed into her chest and flared to life again, heating her armor even as it drove her deeper into the sand.

The fist followed it even before the sand had had a chance to settle and slammed her chest as well, chilling it to freezing temperature in a heartbeat.

Her suit began to flash warnings of impact damage and temperature fluctuations. And that was on top of the warnings for her damaged arm and the internal bleeding that her can was trying to compete with from her two separate flights.

Another shield bash. Followed by another punch.

Then again.

And again in a rapid staccato that seemed to grow faster and more violent with every second.

The sand around her began to melt from the heat before cooling and exploding from the cold. Then a few impacts later it would do it again.

Something cracked with a horrible crunching noise as she felt wind on her face. Her HUD darkened on the left side as she felt some of its LED's fall on her cheek like bits of dirt.

And he still wasn't stopping. Impact after impact rained down upon her like an artillery barrage of fire and ice.

For the first time in years. Since her first year in the armor, while she was still getting used to her newfound abilities.

For the first time in almost two decades, Five felt fear.

It was quickly replaced by pain as some part of her torso armor finally failed and allowed the angry SEAL into her domain. Magical Fire erupted within the suit, melting electrical components, medical tubing, and burned what little flesh she still had left.

Then cold, deeper than any arctic shelf she'd ever walked beneath, followed as she felt something crunch into the housing that held all her vital organs. She felt something in there crush as she suddenly struggled to breath.

She screamed in a horse croaking voice, and the only reason Vickers heard it was because there was daylight coming through a crack in her visor.

Then, miracle of miracles, just as she thought she was about to die. The impacts stopped.

Her HUD stuttered with static and occasionally went dark. But in the brief moments where it showed her display she saw the Chief stand up over her, shield on his left arm, right hand hanging in a mangled mess of ice and blood.

And he began to walk away.

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Vickers looked down at the crushed, smoking, glassed over wreck of a Muck Marcher with anger, and more than a little bit of disgust.

Their chest armor was rent open and caved in from where he'd struck it. Their Helmet was half crushed and had a massive hole where his fist had managed to punch through the heat strained material.

They were dug several feet into the sand, which had fused and cracked several times over from his assault on them. This led him to notice that his pants were burned off from the knees down and his legs were red and burned where they hadn't sunk into the sand beside the armored opponent's body.

Something smelled like shit and meat that was on the verge of spoiling.

"All that armor and you can't even handle body shots." He said as he stepped on the things leg to get out of the crater and begin walking away.

He looked at the Miffy that was nearby. The one that the now smoldering Muck Marcher had been on the verge of inspecting. It hadn't fired the entire time he'd been fighting. Yet as he looked around and the rest of the battle came back into view, he saw that Choi had to have flown at least a bit. A little less than a quarter mile away another one of the Miffy's was on fire, its ammo cooking off from what had to have been its barrels exploding.

He looked back at the one next to them. He wasn't one to leave a job half finished.

Setting the shield on his back for a moment, he used his good hand to fish around in his bag again.

He made a point of ignoring the pain in his right hand. He could see the black and blue flesh under the layer of ice. Could see the bits of metal, and whatever else the Muck Marcher had been made of, sticking in between a pair of knuckles. It had blood frozen onto it.

He'd deal with that later. Just bad luck that it was his right hand.

After a few moments he found what he wanted.

He tucked the small white brick under his right arm as he grabbed his shield again.

Then the one Miffy that he hadn't been able to get to, the one in the center of the camp with a magnetically accelerated mortar, fired.

ZZZZZZZZPHUMPF! BANG!

Vickers saw the small vapor cone as the round immediately broke the sound barrier upon exiting the barrier.

"Shit." He said.

He looked back at the Miffy he'd been on the verge of destroying, and decided that maybe that could remain half finished for now.

Now he had a slightly more important target to deal with.

He began to run.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yjmt3x/wait_is_this_just_gate_252/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (250/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yf5euo/wait_is_this_just_gate_249/)

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Joey's head shot up and saw the door now lit around its edges with a soft pink light from the runes in its frame.

"Shit!" He yelled as he leapt up and ran out of the room. "SERGEANT MARIUS!!!" He yelled down the hall as he ran.

He almost ran over a pair of servants as he exited past the magical door and froze.

"Hello." He said as he blushed. "Sorry. Please send for Sergeant Marius if you can. I'm going to see if I can find him."

One of the two people nodded in confusion.

"Thank you." Joey said before running again.

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Vickers sprung from the ground as the Muck Marcher got next to the last Miffy he'd rigged. They'd clearly been studying it as they'd gotten nearer, and as they looked up at the multi-barrelled canon he'd known the game was up.

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Then he'd seen the Muck Marcher on the verge of climbing up the side of the vehicle to inspect whatever it had noticed.

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Then he burst into motion.

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The Muck Marcher was already facing him as he took his first step toward them. Their right hand was already bringing a rifle up to aim at him. Their left hand was bringing out a knife that was practically identical to his.

But for probably the first time in the Muck Marchers entire career, someone was faster than they were. He saw them take a half step back in surprise at the speed of his approach.

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The rifle shot sideways, and for just a split second the SEAL thought that he'd successfully disarmed the cyborg.

Then he saw the hand of the suit bent almost backwards on itself, at an angle that would have shattered a human wrist. But it still held the rifle with a vice-like grip.

He didn't have time to follow up as he had to immediately dodge back, narrowly avoiding a knife to the ribs as he did.

He also didn't give them any time to try to bring the rifle back forward and up. He stepped in again, left hand wielding the knife as his icy right blocked and redirected the rapid swings of the enemy blade.

He and his fellow SEALS had trained knife fighting almost as a hobby back on Earth, frequently sparring with kali sticks, markers, and rubber training blades. He'd also gotten quite a bit better with a sword and shield specifically for his mission to this world.

But the Muck Marcher was faster than anyone he'd ever gone toe to toe with before.

They were keeping up with him even as he saw the right hand snap itself back into position.

He was evenly matching an armored opponent who was only using one arm to fight him.

Shit. He thought. *That's not good.*

"Nice to meet you Vickers." The Muck Marcher said through its speaker as it took a step forward, pressing him a step back. "I've read your file. Cool magic punch."

Vickers flew back, his breath knocked out of him, as a knee that was faster than he could see slammed into his torso. He slammed into the sand and rolled in a spray of fine grit. But he'd been hit harder than that before. Or at least he thought he had. It would depend on how many ribs ended up broken after this.

He used the roll and his momentum to land on his feet as he came to terms with what had just happened.

The Muck Marcher was already on him.

"Sadly." The cyborg said as it began harassing him with its knife again. He noticed that it was simply holding its rifle at its side, not involving it or its arm in the fight still. "You've brought a fist and a knife to an armored gun fight."

Then Vickers saw a window. His fist flashed through the opening in his opponents defenses and flew towards their helmeted face.

PING!!!

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There wasn't a scratch on the helmet, and the ice he'd left behind flaked off like nothing. Their head wasn't even cocked back.

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"Harder it is." Vickers added as he focused the energy onto his central knuckle.

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Fus Ro Dah motherfucker.

The Muck Marcher flinched back ever so slightly at the unexpectedly fast intruder to their personal space. The small bit of space it made in doing so actually let Vickers get just the right amount of extension on his arm to make the punch connect just the way he wanted.

His fist impacted the Muck Marcher's chest like a cannon shot. There was the briefest moment, not even a tenth of a second, where the cyborg was still on the ground in front of him.

He heard, and felt, the bones in his hand crack and break from the impact. He had to have broken at least three of his knuckles, and who knew how many of his metacarpal bones. He felt the pain of it scream up his arm and into his brain. But he'd broken his hands before. He'd live.

He heard something that sounded like a person being slugged in the gut. A slight "Oof!" sound. But it came from the suit's speaker.

Then the Muck Marcher was flying.

It didn't go far. Maybe ten yards. Fifteen tops. As it turned out, all that metal, machinery, and circuitry made the Muck Marchers damned heavy. But it had the desired effect as he saw the cyborg slam into the sand on its back, kicking up a massive cloud of sand.

He had a moment of triumphant pride.

Then his hand started hurting. He brought it in close and began shaking it as he took deep breaths.

"Ooooow!" He said to nobody.

Then he heard something.

"You have committed acts of war and crimes of malice against the nation of Petravus and its citizens!" He heard the princess say somewhere in the distance. She must have been doing the glowy mouth thing that her and her father could do when they needed.

That meant that shit was going down.

He sheathed the knife in his left hand and began fishing through his bottomless bag, looking for the message stone that would let him talk to them. His right hand made the job difficult. But he had to tell them that the Miffy's were rigged. Or at least they should be, assuming the spiders had done the job.

"Hehehehe!" He heard from within the now settling dust cloud. He froze as he realized what it meant. "That was a lot better chief." He heard a grunt of discomfort just as his left hand found the smooth white stone with the green and red symbols on it. "Still not hard enough though."

He quickly lifted the stone to his mouth, using his broken hand to swipe the symbols on it, just as he saw the rifle aimed at his chest.

"CHOI!" He yelled into it as he spun around. "FLY!"

BA-BA-BANG!

Vickers felt heat as a bright orange light flared out.

\----------

James was faster on the draw than the Major. He knew he would be.

BANG!

His pistol cracked once and he watched, with a sense of joy that he felt just a bit bad about despite everything else, as the Major's pistol was launched from her hand before she gripped at her gunshot forearm.

She glared at him with a look that promised vengeance.

CLANG!

James peeked over and saw Amina's sword pressed against Driscoll's forearm even as the Muck Marcher fought to loosen its pistol arm from a thick coating of webbing and some other goo that James didn't want to think of. Kai was moving and flexing his control arm rapidly, his face now covered in the many eyed mask that James had seen before.

"Drop it!" The First Sergeant commanded, drawing James's attention back quickly. He turned to see the man aiming his rifle at James. "Drop the pistol."

"You drop yours first." James said as his pistol continued aiming at the Major. "I was trying to do this the peaceful way. Y'all are the ones who got rude."

"Fuck you, you spidery bitch!" Driscoll yelled off to the side as his helmet was quickly wrapped in webs, spiders skittering all over him. Amina drove her sword into the weak point under his shoulder with a metallic grinding noise as she used her shield to keep the Muck Marcher's grasping hand away from her. After a moment there was a loud crunching noise as the arm popped off and was carried away by the horde of arachnids.

James looked back at the two soldiers and tilted his head as he cocked an eyebrow.

The First Sergeant made the mistake of looking over at the skirmish between the three combatants. And that was all James needed.

His left hand flashed forward, leather wrapped handle in its grip. There was a metallic rasping noise that bordered on mechanical. Then a length of chain ripped the rifle from the soldier's hands violently faster than he could react.

First Sergeant Nguyen looked at his unexpectedly empty hand in shock.

"Thank god. Finally dialing that in." James said as the chain snaked back around. "First Sergeant. Do I know you from somewhere?" He asked, hand on his hip. "You know what? Not important. Vickers needs me." He looked over to where Kai was standing over the now unrecognizable Driscoll, who more closely resembled the end of a Q-tip than a person. "Kai. Mind wrapping these two up?"

Kai nodded, then flexed his arm. James watched with satisfaction as the horde of spiders swarmed over the two soldiers.

Then, despite his incredibly traumatizing memories of what had happened the last time, James began to fly upwards just as the first of the Petravian soldiers made it to their location.

He regretted it almost immediately as he heard the Major, in her last few seconds before becoming a coccoon, yell.

"FIRE AT WILL!" She yelled. James heard it reverberate through the camp from unseen speakers.

Suddenly, the world became thunder.

Amina. He thought as he heard the rippling cracks, and buzzing chatter of the assault rifles and LMG's below him. *Survive this. Please.*

And then the nearest Miffy began to fire at him.

Not this time motherfuckers. He thought.

His eyes began to glow.

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Joey watched as Sergeant Marius, a brawny half dwarf with a spirally mustache, hopped back through the door. He landed on his feet and then put his hands on his knees.

"That'll take some learnin'." He said as he fought to keep his breakfast down. "Bit spinny."

"That's the bottomless bag sub-dimension." Joey said. "You go weightless for just a second."

"Sure lad." The Sergeant said as he stood up and took a deep breath. Then he looked around and nodded at what he saw. "Guardian." He said. "You and your special squad ready?"

"We are." The massive elf said as she slung the simple rifle on her shoulder. "All of us are armed and loaded with the new weapons."

Marius stepped out of the way. "On your way then." He instructed. "One at a time, give the person in front of ya a second to move out of the way before you go. Exit's about a mile from the action. You'll hear it."

"It's already begun?" Ira'Nyl asked.

"Aye." The dwarf answered.

She nodded and looked back at the other Petravian riflemen. "On the double then." She said and immediately jumped into the open door.

Marius stood to the side and held a hand up in a stop gesture for a few moments to prevent a pile-up on the other side. Then he waved the next soldier through.

"The other troops ready?" Marius asked as he waved a third soldier through.

Joey nodded.

"Good. Go get the next one and have em line up outside, single file. I want archers." The Sergeant instructed.

"O-Okay." Joey stammered as he moved to do so.

The door actually works long distance. He thought with a smile. Then he thought of what Sergeant Marius had said and looked back, the smile fading. *But they ARE fighting over there. Hope Jamesy's alright.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yikr2z/wait_is_this_just_gate_251/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (250/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yf5dcs/wait_is_this_just_gate_249/) /
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He had a moment of triumphant pride.

Then his hand started hurting. He brought it in close and began shaking it as he took deep breaths.

"Ooooow!" He said to nobody.

Then he heard something.

^("You have committed acts of war and crimes of malice against the nation of Petravus and its citizens!") He heard the princess say somewhere in the distance. She must have been doing the glowy mouth thing that her and her father could do when they needed.

That meant that shit was going down.

He sheathed the knife in his left hand and began fishing through his bottomless bag, looking for the message stone that would let him talk to them. His right hand made the job difficult. But he had to tell them that the Miffy's were rigged. Or at least they should be, assuming the spiders had done the job.

"Hehehehe!" He heard from within the now settling dust cloud. He froze as he realized what it meant. "That was a lot better chief." He heard a grunt of discomfort just as his left hand found the smooth white stone with the green and red symbols on it. "Still not hard enough though."

He quickly lifted the stone to his mouth, using his broken hand to swipe the symbols on it, just as he saw the rifle aimed at his chest.

"CHOI!" He yelled into it as he spun around. "FLY!"

BA-BA-BANG!

Vickers felt heat as a bright orange light flared out.

\----------

James was faster on the draw than the Major. He knew he would be.

BANG!

His pistol cracked once and he watched, with a sense of joy that he felt just a bit bad about despite everything else, as the Major's pistol was launched from her hand before she gripped at her gunshot forearm.

She glared at him with a look that promised vengeance.

CLANG!

James peeked over and saw Amina's sword pressed against Driscoll's forearm even as the Muck Marcher fought to loosen its pistol arm from a thick coating of webbing and some other goo that James didn't want to think of. Kai was moving and flexing his control arm rapidly, his face now covered in the many eyed mask that James had seen before.

"Drop it!" The First Sergeant commanded, drawing James's attention back quickly. He turned to see the man aiming his rifle at James. "Drop the pistol."

"You drop yours first." James said as his pistol continued aiming at the Major. "I was trying to do this the peaceful way. Y'all are the ones who got rude."

"Fuck you, you spidery bitch!" Driscoll yelled off to the side as his helmet was quickly wrapped in webs, spiders skittering all over him. Amina drove her sword into the weak point under his shoulder with a metallic grinding noise as she used her shield to keep the Muck Marcher's grasping hand away from her. After a moment there was a loud crunching noise as the arm popped off and was carried away by the horde of arachnids.

James looked back at the two soldiers and tilted his head as he cocked an eyebrow.

The First Sergeant made the mistake of looking over at the skirmish between the three combatants. And that was all James needed.

His left hand flashed forward, leather wrapped handle in its grip. There was a metallic rasping noise that bordered on mechanical. Then a length of chain ripped the rifle from the soldier's hands violently faster than he could react.

First Sergeant Nguyen looked at his unexpectedly empty hand in shock.

"Thank god. Finally dialing that in." James said as the chain snaked back around. "First Sergeant. Do I know you from somewhere?" He asked, hand on his hip. "You know what? Not important. Vickers needs me." He looked over to where Kai was standing over the now unrecognizable Driscoll, who more closely resembled the end of a Q-tip than a person. "Kai. Mind wrapping these two up?"

Kai nodded, then flexed his arm. James watched with satisfaction as the horde of spiders swarmed over the two soldiers.

Then, despite his incredibly traumatizing memories of what had happened the last time, James began to fly upwards just as the first of the Petravian soldiers made it to their location.

He regretted it almost immediately as he heard the Major, in her last few seconds before becoming a coccoon, yell.

"FIRE AT WILL!" She yelled. James heard it reverberate through the camp from unseen speakers.

Suddenly, the world became thunder.

Amina. He thought as he heard the rippling cracks, and buzzing chatter of the assault rifles and LMG's below him. *Survive this. Please.*

And then the nearest Miffy began to fire at him.

Not this time motherfuckers. He thought.

His eyes began to glow.

\------------------

Joey watched as Sergeant Marius, a brawny half dwarf with a spirally mustache, hopped back through the door. He landed on his feet and then put his hands on his knees.

"That'll take some learnin'." He said as he fought to keep his breakfast down. "Bit spinny."

"That's the bottomless bag sub-dimension." Joey said. "You go weightless for just a second."

"Sure lad." The Sergeant said as he stood up and took a deep breath. Then he looked around and nodded at what he saw. "Guardian." He said. "You and your special squad ready?"

"We are." The massive elf said as she slung the simple rifle on her shoulder. "All of us are armed and loaded with the new weapons."

Marius stepped out of the way. "On your way then." He instructed. "One at a time, give the person in front of ya a second to move out of the way before you go. Exit's about a mile from the action. You'll hear it."

"It's already begun?" Ira'Nyl asked.

"Aye." The dwarf answered.

She nodded and looked back at the other Petravian riflemen. "On the double then." She said and immediately jumped into the open door.

Marius stood to the side and held a hand up in a stop gesture for a few moments to prevent a pile-up on the other side. Then he waved the next soldier through.

"The other troops ready?" Marius asked as he waved a third soldier through.

Joey nodded.

"Good. Go get the next one and have em line up outside, single file. I want archers." The Sergeant instructed.

"O-Okay." Joey stammered as he moved to do so.

The door actually works long distance. He thought with a smile. Then he thought of what Sergeant Marius had said and looked back, the smile fading. *But they ARE fighting over there. Hope Jamesy's alright.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yiknbd/wait_is_this_just_gate_251/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (249/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ye9qrf/wait_is_this_just_gate_248/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yg1uls/wait_is_this_just_gate_250/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (249/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ye9p0o/wait_is_this_just_gate_248/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/yg1rf2/wait_is_this_just_gate_250/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (248/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ycnj4i/wait_is_this_just_gate_247/)

Writer's note: Spent yesterday living in my bathroom. Super fun. Wait staff wasn't as attentive as I would've hoped. But still, 5/7 would poo again.

Enjoy.

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When Amina reunited with James it had been after hours of anticipation.

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She'd wanted to ride Steve up to him as fast as she could. But she had a professional duty to stay by the troops and not let her love life make her look like some lovesick teen. Plus the path was already packed with the troops in formation, and to rush past on a massive drake would have put her or them in danger of sliding down the loose scree on the sides, potentially to their deaths.

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"Rrrrhph!" James spat as the drakes tongue coated his face in thick saliva. James fought to keep the long forked enemy away even as Steve's head pushed him flat and pressed against him. "Off Boy!" He yelled. "AAGH!" Then Steve completely covered him with his jaw. James kicked feebly at the thick mane of hair on the drake's neck. ^("AMINA!") He cried out, though it was muffled by his oppressor.

"You deserve it!" She yelled as she jumped off the saddle and slid down. She yanked at Steve's fur and began slamming her hand into his side. He lifted his head to look at her and she quickly bent down and forcibly pulled James up onto his feet and into an embrace, ignoring the layer of slime on his face as he wrapped his arms around her to return the gesture. "Steve was the only reason I didn't think you were dead." She said softly into his ear.

James pulled back a bit and used the sleeve of his shirt to wipe his face somewhat clean. Then he pulled her back in and pressed his forehead against hers.

"I know." He said. "I'm so sorry. I'd thought the worst had happened to you two as well."

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"He almost died." Said a flat somewhat jilting voice.

Amina's head snapped off to the side. In her excitement to see James again she'd almost forgotten that he wasn't alone.

Standing only a few steps away was a tall, muscular yet slim, dark elf. He wore simple, almost skin tight, clothes of red and dark blue. She looked at him curiously for a moment before she saw a small spider resting on his shoulder, and a series of multicolored strings and a gold and white band wrapped around his right arm.

"Sorry." James said. "Amina, this is Kai. Full name unpronounceable. One of the twelve guardians." He was about to introduce her to the elf when Amina quickly pushed away and took a knee with her head bowed.

"An honor." She said now that she knew just who, and what, the elf was. "I wasn't aware that one of the Guardians was present."

James gawked at her in surprise. "Kai. This is-"

"Princess, and General, Amina of Petravus." Kai interrupted.

Now James gawked at Kai. "You two.... know each other?" He wondered.

Kai nodded. "As a guardian I have entreated with the royal family numerous times." He said simply. "After all, my domain of protection covers nearly half of the country." He held his hand out and Amina looked at it curiously. "Please princess. This is hardly a formal setting. Please stand."

"My apologies." She said as she let him aide her to her feet.

"For what?" He asked, beating James to the words by only a split second. "You have done me no wrongs. And I am not surprised to be unrecognized. The last time I was in your father's castle you were still a bundle in your mother's arms."

"Am I.... missing something here?" James asked. "What's happening?"

"James." Amina hissed. "This is a guardian prince."

James was about to agree and ask what the deal was when Kai beat him to talking again.

"Not on this day princess." He said in a low voice, his face barely containing anger.

Both she and James looked at Kai in surprise. Without realizing it, both of their hands went to their weapons of choice. Him to his pistol, and her to her sword.

"Today." He continued. "I am an avenging prince."

Then, as if a switch had been thrown, his face lightened.

"But James can be the one to tell you why." He said as his right hand began to twitch and spasm. "I am..... dealing with something."

She turned back to look at James who bore a pained half smile.

"Been a rough week." He said softly. "Come on. I'll tell you while the rest of your people come up."

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Once he'd gotten within twenty five yards of it he'd been able to move a bit more freely. After all they were PRIMARILY defensive weapons systems. They weren't designed to engage targets at close range. As a result they were unmanned and the machine gun turrets on top of their cabs were empty.

Sure they still had cameras, but their primary sensor suites wouldn't be able to detect him that close, and even if they did the primary weapons wouldn't be able to engage him unless the entire rig relocated.

It had taken him hours to get this close. Almost a whole day once he'd gotten over the dune nearest to the vehicle.

But he'd "neutralized" these kinds of defensive positions in training before, including one Chinese knock off that was SUPPOSED to have an even better sensor suite. Not that he ever trusted that kind of intel. But still, for training purposes they'd respected the listed specs and proceeded as necessary.

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So he was more than a little annoyed when, as he got within a few yards of the truck, the sand near its base began to move and writhe, as if something was moving under it.

After a few moments several large spiders emerged and seemed to stare at him as if curious.

He'd done training when he was becoming a SEAL to avoid freaking out about creepy crawlies. Had even eaten a few spiders during survival training. Hell, you couldn't become a sniper if creepy crawlies could make you give up your position.

Still, the sight of what these things had done to the two soldiers the day before was fresh in his mind as the large tan arachnids seemed to stare at him curiously. He had to fight to suppress the urge to shudder. He may have been under the radar with the Miffy. But he still didn't want to move too much and draw the attention of its remote operators.

One of the spiders crawled up until it was almost touching him and stared into his eyes even as they hid behind the shroud of his ghillie.

"What do you want?" He hissed at it in a whisper.

The spider perked up and raised its two front legs. He thought he'd seen a video somewhere that that was how spiders did greetings or mating rituals or something. He stared at it curiously.

"You with the elf?" He asked.

The arms moved up and down.

"That a yes?" He asked. Then he thought about the situation. "Ugh. I'm talking to a fucking spider. What the fuck happened to my life?"

The spider tilted a bit, almost like a dog tilting its head.

Vickers let out a deep, incredibly exhausted, sigh.

"Okay." He said, surrendering to the surreal nature of the situation. "If you're with the elf raise and lower your legs twice."

There was a delay as, he assumed, the spider relayed the message back. How? He didn't know, and kind of didn't want to.

Then the spider raised ALL of its legs up and down twice.

Vickers blinked rapidly at what he was assuming was some form of sarcasm. Though, from the elf or the spider he wasn't entirely certain.

"Okay spider-elf." He said. "You here to help? Or are you just showing off?"

The spider raised its legs, only the front pair this time, and lowered them again.

Vickers stared at it. He sighed again.

"Fair enough." He said. "Can you actually hear me? Or are you reading my lips or something?"

This time the spider didn't raise its legs, but instead rushed across the sand, skittering its legs rapidly as it did. Vickers watched it curiously as it did... whatever it was doing.

After a moment it stood to the side and made like it was headbutting in the direction of the mess it had made.

Vickers peered up at the Miffy for a second. Then, gambling that no one was ACTIVELY watching the camera feeds, lifted up a bit to get a better look at the spiders work.

"Huh." He said in surprise as he saw a crude drawing of a human ear. He looked down at the spider in surprise. "Nice. Alright little... spider... bro." He said as he slowly spread his ghillie out into a sort of low tent with his body as his arms spread the sand underneath him. "I'll show you the game plan."

The spider watched him create the makeshift space curiously, then after a moment of hesitation, rushed into one of the openings of the ghillie cloak.

Vickers pulled slowly pulled one of the cryo rounds from his bottomless bag and held it up where the spider to see.

"See this?" He said. "I got about thirty of these things. And they are going to cause these things." He gestured in the direction of the Miffy. "To have a real bad day if they decide to use em."

The spider, and by extension Kai, watched and listened curiously as Vickers laid out his plan.

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"Um. Ma'am?" One of the techs in the Control room said.

"What is it?" The Major asked from where she was reading the info that she'd gotten from Earth.

"Um. Vehicle three has eyes on something you're gonna want to see." The young woman said in surprise. "I'm already setting off a drone to get a better view."

"Main screen." The Major replied. The tech nodded and the main screen was suddenly taken up by a feed overlooking the dunes towards the entrance to the desert. "Ah. Just as expected."

On the screen an entire army was marching toward them in formation.

At the front of it were a horse, being ridden by the princess she'd seen in their intelligence reports, a massive furred lizard being ridden by Captain Choi, and a dark skinned man who seemed to float along the ground as if he was hovering. She didn't recognize that one.

Behind them was at least three thousand Royal Army soldiers of different types. Some on horseback. Some flying in the air and wearing ornate robes. Many simply marching in the familiar style that any soldier would recognize.

"Call Driscoll and Nguyen." She said as she stood up. "Let em know what's going on."

She was about to leave when she noticed that the lone Muck Marcher, the one she only knew as "Five" was staring at one of the feeds. She'd expected the armored woman to respond, since she'd have an easier time reaching Driscoll than anyone else.

"Something wrong?" She asked as she turned to face the armored operative.

Five turned her helmeted head ever so slightly, as if noticing the Major for the first time.

"No ma'am." Said the tinny sounding speakers in a raspy voice. She began walking out of the room ahead of the Major. "Driscoll's already on his way. I just saw something funny. Gonna go check it out."

The Major watched Five stomp out of the room, then turned to the tech whose station she'd been looming over. She raised an eyebrow in question.

The tech shook his head and shrugged. "I don't know ma'am." He said. "I couldn't see what she was looking at. She didn't say anything to me."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/yf5euo/wait_is_this_just_gate_249/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (248/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ycnhc4/wait_is_this_just_gate_247/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Spent yesterday living in my bathroom. Super fun. Wait staff wasn't as attentive as I would've hoped. But still, 5/7 would poo again.

Enjoy.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (247/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ya3ikq/wait_is_this_just_gate_246/)

Writer's note: Hey. That dude we haven't seen in a minute. Wonder what HE'S up to?

Enjoy.

\~

Master Sergeant Nguyen marched brusquely towards the command tent from the Miffy, and now drone control, tent.

Over the past few weeks here he'd been relegated from being the de facto second in command to basically being the Major's gofer. At first he'd been somewhat annoyed at the sudden lack of involvement in anything, usually being snubbed in favor of Chief Driscoll and his crew instead. But, then he'd seen the way things seemed to be going, and realized that his position actually had some advantages.

"Orders from the Major." He said as he stepped into the tent and sat next to Isaacs.

"What's she want this time?" He asked as he sipped his cool coffee. "Tanks? A few of those new F-40R's? Maybe a personal massage therapist?"

Nguyen glanced around at the other techs, some of whom he knew were more in the Major's camp than his. Most of them were still busily working at their stations. But one or two had looked over at the outburst.

Nguyen leaned in as he slid some papers over.

"Chill." He said. He looked around again, then lowered his voice to a barely audible whisper. "What's the word on the other side?"

Isaacs peered around for a moment. Nguyen couldn't help but notice that the Special Forces member was better at being sly than he was. When he was comfortable with the lack of attention he slipped a paper over to Nguyen, who quickly pocketed it.

"No M.S." He said quickly and quietly. "But they're doing what they can to put that damper on both sides of the equation."

Nguyen considered the news, knowing the note would say more. He slowly rose to his feet with a small nod.

"Get those ammo requests in. Let me know when they get here." He said. Then he turned to one of the other techs. "Airman Eirnet." He called. "Chief's got some comm requests on the list for you." The tech nodded and made to set their work aside and come over.

Nguyen gave Isaacs a pat on the shoulder as he stepped back out of the tent.

"Keep up the good work guys." He said as he stepped back out into the sand.

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James and Vickers reached the mountain pass just before sundown, and one day early for Amina and the army to arrive. Vickers helped Choi set up camp for the night, pulling from his bottomless bag to set up tents for the two of them and one small one for their two captives.

They both watched in silent curiosity as Kai sneered at the setting sun. Then he played a series of chords on his harp and Vickers watched as the sand nearby seemed to sink in. The mass of spiders that had been hording around him moving out to interact with whatever was happening there.

"I'll be back at first light." He said as he removed the darkened goggles he'd put on shortly after getting to the surface and later removing the crystal from his forehead.

"Can't stay?" James asked. "Cause of the moon thing?"

"Moon thing?" Vickers wondered as Kai nodded. A few moments later he was slowly descending back into the ground and out of sight.

"Long story." James replied. "Lot's of long stories."

"Well, you're gonna have to tell some of em." Vickers shot back as he dragged one of the two soldiers, still bound and gagged by spider silk, over to the small tent and threw him in. "We got all night and I gotta get back out in the morning."

"You're not staying either?" James asked.

"Can't." Vickers said simply. "Was on an op when you and spider guy made me shit myself. Still need to get eyes on that FOB and see what I can see. Otherwise we're liable to get turned into mincemeat."

"Yeah. I didn't really think about why you were out there in a ghillie suit." James realized.

"No." Vickers agreed. "And we probably set off half the sensors in their command room. Odds are that little hole in the ground is swarming with their people."

He drew out a small folding chair from his bag and set it down. He gestured for James to sit.

"Now tell me what the hell happened to you." He demanded.

James looked over the edge of the nearby ledge, down into the valley below. He could see them, down at the bottom of the mountain pass. The soldiers that Amina had amassed. Their camp stretched for at least a mile or so, and he could see campfires, moving torches, and the occasional colored light that meant someone was using magic. He longed to rush down on his jets and join her.

He turned back and accepted the offered chair. He and Vickers both had jobs to do now. Sappy romantic gestures could come later when they might not cost lives.

"I was flying." James said as his hands wrapped around himself. "I'd finally gotten to where I could see the camp and I put on the glasses. I was zooming in on the Miffy's because I wasn't sure what they were." He shook his head and pressed his eyes shut. "And then I saw one fire. Just these little flashes at the end of their barrels." He looked up at Vickers, who was doing what he could to hide his concern and awe. "Instincts took over." He continued. "And I tried to dodge."

Then he told him the rest. Vickers' eyes widened as he heard about James's fall. James saw the anger rising as the SEAL's jaw clenched when he heard about the dwarven clan. About the royal army patrol.

About everything.

When it was done Vickers put his pack back on. James was about to question the move. Then thought better of it.

"Choi." He said as he filled his CamelBak with a canteen from his bag. "These Muck Marchers. If they're here than it means these guys have support from on high."

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"Yeah." James agreed.

Vickers looked off into the darkness, in the direction of the desert base.

"Not gonna pretend I haven't done dirt for the Gov." He said with a look of regret. "Been a lotta ops where we had to do stuff that wasn't exactly kosher. But the objective was always to be in and out with as little mess as possible." He nodded. "Best jobs were always the ones where nobody even knew anything was wrong until we were already long gone."

James looked at him, shocked by how upset the usually stoic man seemed.

"And WE..." He jabbed himself in the chest with his thumb. "Were never the ones to do it to allies. That's what shit-bag contractors and the CIA are for."

And just like that, Vickers was stalking out into the darkness, a cold chill emanating from his entire body.

"What are you gonna do?" James asked into the darkness beyond the light of their fire.

"Sneaky shit." Vickers said simply. Then he was gone.

James couldn't even hear the sand or gravel shifting.

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"So let me get this straight." Margaret asked as she, Shrend, and Ambassador Werner spoke. "Healing magic is less about the...." She grasped at the idea. "Chemical? Mechanical?.... Function of the person you're working on healing. And more about.... resetting their injuries to their previous status?"

"That's.... MY... understanding of it." Werner admitted sheepishly. "It's about being able to visualize how a person's body is SUPPOSED to be and using magic to make it that way."

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Werner shrank a little. Margaret thought she saw a bit of anger there. Though the Ambassador was good at hiding it.

"And what about healing sicknesses?" She asked curiously? She noticed Werner perk up a bit. She also knew what James had told her about his Sergeant's death when he'd first gotten here.

Shrend gave a curt nod. "Sickness is.... more.... difficult." He said. He gestured to the room. "Would you like to try a hand at basic healing? Or would you like to learn more about the many ailments of our world?"

She looked at Werner and saw just a hint of jealousy there, though Werner quickly looked back at her notes when she saw Margaret's gaze land on her.

"I can come back to this." She said. "One of the biggest problems any healthcare environment can tackle is infection response and prevention." She said, quoting one of her first college professors.

"I whole heartedly agree." Shrend said with a smile as he gestured for her to follow. "I will warn you." He said as they began walking. "Our Sick-soothers are um.... interesting... individuals. And startlingly rigid."

"Ours tend to be much the same." She said. She looked back at Werner, who was watching her and the massive minotaur leave.

She thought about it for a second. Something there wasn't quite right. But something, her nurse's intuition she thought, made her think that it wasn't malicious.

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Margaret nodded as she waved the woman over. Shrend was too busy talking to notice.

Werner looked around for a moment, then rushed to catch up quietly.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ye9qrf/wait_is_this_just_gate_248/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (247/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ya3hn8/wait_is_this_just_gate_246/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey. That dude we haven't seen in a minute. Wonder what HE'S up to?

Enjoy.

\~

Master Sergeant Nguyen marched brusquely towards the command tent from the Miffy, and now drone control, tent.

Over the past few weeks here he'd been relegated from being the de facto second in command to basically being the Major's gofer. At first he'd been somewhat annoyed at the sudden lack of involvement in anything, usually being snubbed in favor of Chief Driscoll and his crew instead. But, then he'd seen the way things seemed to be going, and realized that his position actually had some advantages.

"Orders from the Major." He said as he stepped into the tent and sat next to Isaacs.

"What's she want this time?" He asked as he sipped his cool coffee. "Tanks? A few of those new F-40R's? Maybe a personal massage therapist?"

Nguyen glanced around at the other techs, some of whom he knew were more in the Major's camp than his. Most of them were still busily working at their stations. But one or two had looked over at the outburst.

Nguyen leaned in as he slid some papers over.

"Chill." He said. He looked around again, then lowered his voice to a barely audible whisper. "What's the word on the other side?"

Isaacs peered around for a moment. Nguyen couldn't help but notice that the Special Forces member was better at being sly than he was. When he was comfortable with the lack of attention he slipped a paper over to Nguyen, who quickly pocketed it.

"No M.S." He said quickly and quietly. "But they're doing what they can to put that damper on both sides of the equation."

Nguyen considered the news, knowing the note would say more. He slowly rose to his feet with a small nod.

"Get those ammo requests in. Let me know when they get here." He said. Then he turned to one of the other techs. "Airman Eirnet." He called. "Chief's got some comm requests on the list for you." The tech nodded and made to set their work aside and come over.

Nguyen gave Isaacs a pat on the shoulder as he stepped back out of the tent.

"Keep up the good work guys." He said as he stepped back out into the sand.

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James and Vickers reached the mountain pass just before sundown, and one day early for Amina and the army to arrive. Vickers helped Choi set up camp for the night, pulling from his bottomless bag to set up tents for the two of them and one small one for their two captives.

They both watched in silent curiosity as Kai sneered at the setting sun. Then he played a series of chords on his harp and Vickers watched as the sand nearby seemed to sink in. The mass of spiders that had been hording around him moving out to interact with whatever was happening there.

"I'll be back at first light." He said as he removed the darkened goggles he'd put on shortly after getting to the surface and later removing the crystal from his forehead.

"Can't stay?" James asked. "Cause of the moon thing?"

"Moon thing?" Vickers wondered as Kai nodded. A few moments later he was slowly descending back into the ground and out of sight.

"Long story." James replied. "Lot's of long stories."

"Well, you're gonna have to tell some of em." Vickers shot back as he dragged one of the two soldiers, still bound and gagged by spider silk, over to the small tent and threw him in. "We got all night and I gotta get back out in the morning."

"You're not staying either?" James asked.

"Can't." Vickers said simply. "Was on an op when you and spider guy made me shit myself. Still need to get eyes on that FOB and see what I can see. Otherwise we're liable to get turned into mincemeat."

"Yeah. I didn't really think about why you were out there in a ghillie suit." James realized.

"No." Vickers agreed. "And we probably set off half the sensors in their command room. Odds are that little hole in the ground is swarming with their people."

He drew out a small folding chair from his bag and set it down. He gestured for James to sit.

"Now tell me what the hell happened to you." He demanded.

James looked over the edge of the nearby ledge, down into the valley below. He could see them, down at the bottom of the mountain pass. The soldiers that Amina had amassed. Their camp stretched for at least a mile or so, and he could see campfires, moving torches, and the occasional colored light that meant someone was using magic. He longed to rush down on his jets and join her.

He turned back and accepted the offered chair. He and Vickers both had jobs to do now. Sappy romantic gestures could come later when they might not cost lives.

"I was flying." James said as his hands wrapped around himself. "I'd finally gotten to where I could see the camp and I put on the glasses. I was zooming in on the Miffy's because I wasn't sure what they were." He shook his head and pressed his eyes shut. "And then I saw one fire. Just these little flashes at the end of their barrels." He looked up at Vickers, who was doing what he could to hide his concern and awe. "Instincts took over." He continued. "And I tried to dodge."

Then he told him the rest. Vickers' eyes widened as he heard about James's fall. James saw the anger rising as the SEAL's jaw clenched when he heard about the dwarven clan. About the royal army patrol.

About everything.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (246/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y9ad5m/wait_is_this_just_gate_245/)

Writer's note: Battle buddies are always gonna be battle buddies. Even if antagonistic ones. *^(Halfhearted Hooah.)*

Enjoy.

\~

Driscoll entered the decontamination chamber with a clang as he closed the door. then he hit the blue pad with his armored hand, informing it that he was ready for the decon action to start.

A series of nozzles blasted him from all sides with alternating streams of boiling hot water and jets of high pressure air, cleaning the sand and other debris off of him and doing their best to sanitize his armor at the same time. Once they were done with their thirty second cycle a series of heat panels activated to dry him and kill off anything that remained. He watched patiently as the temperature outside the suit rose to nearly three hundred degrees and then remained there for another thirty seconds.

Once the cycle was complete the door on the wall in front of him opened and he stepped into a smaller room that had cold, air conditioned, air

blasted right onto him. It cooled the exterior of his armor until it would be safe to touch.

Then he stepped into the sterilized room beyond and saw Rodriguez.

The Toolies, that was what they called their combination doctors and suit mechanics, were working on him in their inflated sterile room suits. One was slowly but surely laying down the fiber optic based panels that made up the interiors of their helmets. Each cell was less than three millimeters wide and hexagon shaped. They had to be layered in a specific pattern and order, and he knew it would take hours to even get half the display mapped.

The other Toolie was working on Rodriguez himself.

It had been more than five years since Driscoll had seen Rodriguez's body, such as it was, out of his suit. He looked down at his own armored chest and wondered how long it had even been since he'd seen his own body.

Rodriguez was, like most of their crew, a lifer. He'd signed on for the experimental program because his only other option had been to spend his remaining days sitting in a hospital somewhere, letting machines do most of his living for him anyways. Like Driscoll, the military had given him an offer. To still be hooked up to machines, and dependent on them to live, but also to be ambulatory and capable of interacting with the world, even if through a mechanical filter. The other upside was that doing so would give him a chance to get back at the people that had put him in his condition in the first place.

Just like Driscoll, and so many others, Rodriguez had jumped at the opportunity.

Driscoll looked at the third of a body that was Rodriguez's entirety with shame. There were no arms, those had been reduced to stubs that ended just below his shoulder joints, each of them had a series of metal sensors embedded in them. His torso ended at an angle, the lower end of which stopped just below his left rib-cage, and the higher end of which was just below his right nipple. There was the standard interface collar, a mixture of steel braided cables and hoses layered over a metal plate, that plate was fastened to each side of his collar bone and shoulder blades, and had a series of plugs that ran up his back before going into the base of his skull.

Below the end of Rodriguez's torso was what all of them called the shit can. It was designed to look like a continuation of their bodies, for the sake of symmetry inside their suits. But there was no disguising the carbon nanotube reinforced mixture of metal and ceramic sections that, for all intents and purposes made up whatever organs they needed to live. In Rodriguez's case that consisted of his liver, a kidney that also doubled as an automatic oncocidal monitor/injector, one lung, and his entire gut. All of which were lab designed for efficiency, and grown with stem cells and REG-TEK cell recombination technology.

They called it the shit can because the one thing that each and every one of them had had replaced was their digestive system. That, and the fact that if the metal housing was ever breached or compromised, it was basically a death sentence for whoever it was attached to.

Luckily for Driscoll's shame that wasn't what had happened to Rodriguez.

He watched for a moment as the Toolie continued working on the two implants in the man's eye sockets. When the tech paused to grab a tool, Driscoll spoke up.

"Hey Rod." He said as he gingerly tapped a finger to the man's forehead.

"Boss?" Rodriguez asked as he lifted his head up to touch the finger in return. It was the only movement any of them were really capable of out of the suits, and so the traditional method of returning the greeting.

"Yeah." Driscoll replied. "How you doin?"

"Felt like takin' a walk. Gettin' some nice, fresh air. You know?" Rodriguez said with a grin. "Shame about the view."

And just like that Driscoll's tension eased. Rodriguez had always been the one person in the crew that could make any of the others cool down. He was, as far as the suits allowed, their big man. The guy they all looked to for reassuring words or a good laugh. Even Driscoll.

"What's the damage?" He asked.

"Pretty much what you see." Rodriguez replied with an attempted shrug. "Burns on my face, not that I was winning any beauty contests anyways. And my eyes. I'll be using the pinhole interface from here on out."

Driscoll nodded solemnly. He knew several other members of their force that had the same interface. It allowed them to see. But not the same way they'd been seeing their whole lives up until that point. Less like actual eyes and more like a simplified, permanent HUD. And only when they had their suit's helmet on.

He reached out and rubbed a knuckle on the man's sternum for a moment. Their equivalent of a hand on the shoulder for those who.... no longer had shoulders to speak of.

"I'm sorry." He said. "I-" He began.

"Don't be." Rodriguez cut him off. "It was a shit op, and some bad luck against an enemy we had no intel on. If I hadn't been rockin' the shotty and some fire shells I'd've probably tried the same thing." He said as he looked, so to speak, off to the side. "I was in the wrong spot at the wrong time and even with the suit's warning I didn't have the time to react. Noone would've."

Driscoll hung his head a bit. He knew that his friend was right. But it still didn't make him feel that much better.

"You want someone to blame?" Rodriguez continued. "Blame those fuckin' smart ass spiders." He said. "I mean... spiders dodging bullets? That's some bullshit."

Driscoll let out a quick, half hearted, laugh. "It is aint it?" He asked. He'd had more than his fair share of time to think of that too.

"Fuckin' hated spiders even before that fight." Rodriguez said with a look of disgust. "Now I really hate em."

"That's right." Driscoll said. "I remember that op in the Bering. You got scared of-"

"Fuck them king crabs man." Rodriguez cut him off with a shudder that made the nearby tech place a hand on his chest to still him. "Fuckin big ass spider motherfuckers with their big ass claws."

Driscoll full on bellowed laughter through his speakers. "You started stomping and chopping every crab that touched you. You churned up the water so bad our sensors started to have trouble finding you."

Rodriguez's eyebrows furrowed in anger even as he fought not to laugh himself.

"Like, the closest thing to being in a nightmare." He said. "And all in the black and green of my HUD. Fuckin' terrifying."

"They couldn't have hurt you if they'd wanted to." Driscoll reminded him as he continued laughing.

The two of them stayed like that for a minute. Driscoll laughing and Rodriguez shaking his head and trying to be angry at the memory.

Eventually they calmed down though. Rodriguez broke the ensuing silence first.

"Lost Mudder on that one." He said, his voice growing solemn. "Got caught under that sub when it drifted after we popped it."

Driscoll nodded. "Yeah." He said.

"Happens." Rodriguez said. Then he turned to try to look at Driscoll, though he was off by a few degrees. "But it didn't happen this time."

Driscoll nodded.

"Are you nodding?" Rodriguez asked. "You always nod. I can't see that shit dude."

"You're right." Driscoll said. "Still. Sorry bout the eyes."

"All good boss. Suit's still moving." Rodriguez said.

"Good." Driscoll shot back as he made to leave. "Better get back in it soon. Looks like a fight's comin'."

"On the double boss." Rodriguez replied. "Tell Doc to come see me. I know he got all pissy like he always does."

"Will do." Driscoll said as he stepped back into the decontamination room and closed the door behind him.

\----------

"I must admit I was a touch skeptical when you told me that everyone dies of shock Mrs. Choi." Shrend said as he looked over the translated version of the text book she had been going over with the large minotaur and a few of his fellow healers. "Though, once you explained that you weren't talking about electricity, and that shock actually had a different meaning when it came to medicine it began to make more sense."

"It was one of the first things I was ever taught when I was becoming a paramedic many years ago." Margaret explained. "It's a vast oversimplification of what goes on in a dying body. But it is technically true."

Shrend nodded. "Now, I have seen this Ox-I-Jen mentioned many times in these books. And Arch-Mage Veliry tried to explain it to me once. Though, in her typical fashion, she spoke too fast for most of us to keep up."

Margaret nodded back. "She has that tendency doesn't she." She turned her English version of the book to its appendix to find the section on oxygenation. She was about to flip to the page in question when her son walked in.

"Hi mom." He said. "Hello Mr. Farstorm." He said with a wave.

"Mr. Choi." Shrend said with a smile. "Good to see you again. Is everything okay?"

Joey nodded. "Just here to see my mom. Someone said she was here."

"You know Mr. Shrend?" Margaret asked.

Joey nodded again. "I met him one of the first days we were allowed to move about freely. I couldn't help but introduce myself and ask him some questions." He said with just a hint of embarrassment.

"We were just going over the medical textbooks James had brought over." Margaret said as she pointed at the book resting on the meeting table in front of them. "Seeing if we can bridge the gap between Earth Science and Petravian Magic."

"Cool." Joey said as he looked at the book. He touched his finger to the page just under the chapter title before quickly pulling his hand back with a look of disgust. "Are you going to learn healing magic?" He asked.

"I uh..." She began with a confused look around the room. The other healers looked at her curiously. "I don't... know." She looked back at Shrend. "Can I?"

Shrend shrugged with a look of confusion himself. "I assumed that was part of why you wanted to work with us." He said simply. "To learn healing magic and see if your knowledge helped with it."

Joey bounced lightly on his feet as he placed a hand on her shoulder. "You should do it mom." He said excitedly. "Then we'll have an entire adventure party family. Amina as the tank. James as the half caster. Me as the mage. And you for healing."

She looked at him with her eyebrows knit in concern. "Joey I am NOT an adventurer." She said in a slightly frustrated tone. "And I do NOT know any magic."

"We can teach you." Said an older looking, short statured, woman at the table. "We are already teaching your ambassador healing magic. Though she hasn't had the results she was hoping for just yet."

Margaret turned to look at the speaker in shock. "Ambassador Werner is learning healing magic?" She asked. *I thought James said she was a cold b-word. Why would she want to learn healing magic.*

"Indeed." Shrend confirmed. "Though, I would be uncomfortable speaking of HER... reasoning." He said with a hint of venom as he emphasized the word while glaring at the other healers. "Without her permission."

Margaret nodded. "I see that patient confidentiality is a thing here too." She said. Shrend nodded "Good."

"I will tell you that she is here though." Shrend said. "She's in a lesson right now. Would you care to meet her? Maybe she can help you learn healing magic. Since she would likely have had a similar starting point to you."

"Do it mom." Joey said as he continued bouncing.

"I... I guess." She said as she started to stand up.

I guess I'm learning magic now too. She thought, slightly irritated at the idea. *I'm too old to be back in school.*

\---

"James." Kai said softly as he nudged James's shoulder.

"Hmm?" James grumbled as he faded back into wakefulness.

"Wake up. We are only a few minutes away from the surface."

"Already?" James said as he yawned and straightened out his legs to stretch.

"It has been three hours since last we spoke." Kai said in response. "Another few hundred meters and we should be back roughly where you were retrieved by the dwarves. Though my spiders tell me that that position is guarded, so we are emerging a few dozen yards away.

James slowly gained his feet, stretching his back as he rolled to an upright standing position. He jammed his arms out ramrod straight, the muscles tensing as he yawned again and rolled his hands around in a slow, shaky, circular motion.

"You ready for this?" He asked as he double checked his newly rebuilt weapons. He shook the sleep out with a quick crack of his neck. "Can you go on the surface?" James wondered.

Kai nodded. "I can. So long as I return before nightfall."

James looked at him curiously.

Kai peered at James's left arm. "The same god that granted you that arm happens to be an enemy of the god that granted me MY powers." He said sternly.

James looked at the wolf arm for a moment. Then nodded understanding.

"Fuck em all. Right?" He said.

Kai thought for a moment, then nodded once. James watched as he pulled the harp over his arm like he had when he'd been fighting the Muck Marchers.... how many days ago now?

Kai's left hand reached out and the many-eyed mask glided into his hand. Instead of placing the mask on his face Kai pulled a single gem from it and then placed it on his belt. He took the single, slightly green, gem and pressed it to his forehead. James watched as the flesh there parted with a barely audible pop. Then the gem settled in place and began glowing.

He could ask questions later, he hoped. Before them, a bit of rock crumbled away from the ceiling and sand began to pour into the tunnel before a spray of webs crossed underneath the opening and halted the flow. A wave of spiders skittered up the walls and across the ceiling and made quick work of moving the sand aside and creating a vertical shaft large enough for their platform.

"Not to offend or anything." James said. "But I just thought you should know that I'm really scared of spiders."

Kai turned and raised an eyebrow. James noticed that the eyes beneath were both sealed shut. Then the elf turned back to the opening as their platform began moving again.

"Noted." He said as they began to rise.

"Remember." James said just as they were about to emerge into the daylight. "Only kill if you have to."

Kai nodded. "I'll try." He said.

\----------

Vickers was only ten yards away from the two lackadaisical soldiers now. He'd spent nearly three hours crossing the desert between his former position and their canopy in small bursts of movement that at times only resulted in inches of gained ground.

Neither of the young soldiers, a specialist and a corporal, had seen him somehow. He wanted to be proud of his training and take credit for being as proficient in stealth as he was. But at some point it stopped being a matter of his skill and more a sign of THEIR incompetence.

For god's sake, this was an empty desert. How had neither of them seen the moving mound of scrub brush and odd looking sand slowly making its way closer? They were, for all purposes, on an alien world. How were they not being more observant.

He was about to make his move, hitting them with a few of the green polymer training rounds that he'd taken from Choi without the young captain knowing. It would beat them up, and shock them off foot, allowing him to close the last few yards and neutralize them easily.

Then something entirely unexpected happened.

The sand beneath him began to rumble softly, vibrating and shifting under him in a way that made his position feel unstable. The two guards seemed to notice too as they both shot to their feet. The one whose rifle had been slung to the canopy retrieved it and checked its safety.

Then Vickers saw something he never could have expected.

Some two dozen yards away Choi appeared, standing next to a tall, midnight black elf. The two of them burst from the ground as if they were part of a magician's stage act.

And they were surrounded by an explosion of moving creatures that made Vickers' skin crawl as he realized what they were.

"Fucking spiders?" He asked under his breath.

The two soldiers seemed to be in a similar state of distress.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" One of them yelled as they raised their weapon to fire.

Something blurred and suddenly the soldier was falling to the ground, their weapon knocked out of their hands as they fell unconscious from some unseen impact.

Vickers watched as Choi recovered the chain weapon, though he also noticed that it looked different. Choi had a look of shocked concern on his face.

The other soldier, the one that hadn't checked his weapon, attempted to fire. The weapon didn't report and they began looking at it. They had forgotten their safety switch.

Before they could correct the mistake a mass of spiders was engulfing them.

Vickers watched in horror as the soldier was quickly rolled across the sand, screaming the entire time. After a few moments the screams were muffled and the swarm of spiders parted to show the soldier bundled as though they were being saved for later. Their mouth was covered in web. Though, not the rest of their face.

Then Vickers saw the swarm turn towards him.

"Oh. Fuck!" He said as he burst to his feet. Rifle held above his head in one hand. "CHOI!" He yelled.

The spiders were only a few feet away.

"CHOIIIII!!!!!" He yelled again, louder.

Choi reached over to the elf and shook their shoulder. His head tilted to the side and Vickers ripped the ghillie covering off of his face.

"Vickers?" Choi asked. "What are you doing here?"

Vickers looked down at the mass of differently colored arachnids. They'd stopped only inches away from him. He resisted the urge to shake a large red and green one off of his boot as it peered up at him.

"What am I doin' here?" He shot back, suddenly angry at how scared he'd just been. "WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?"

The elf looked at Choi curiously. Choi held a hand up as he looked back. "He's cool Kai. He's.... a friend."

Vickers breathed a sigh of relief as the spiders began to draw back.

"As you say." The elf said.

Choi quickly jogged over to the soldier that he'd attacked with his chain, who Vickers now noticed was also bundled like an insect, and reached down to touch the man's neck. After a few moments he nodded.

"Oh thank god." He said as Vickers slowly, and uncertainly, walked over to meet him. "I thought I'd killed him."

"Choi." Vickers said. "What the hell's going on?" He pointed at the elf. "Who the hell is that? And why the FUCK!... did I almost become spider food?"

"Right." Choi said as he stood up and, in a move that surprised Vickers, wrapped him in a hug. "It is so good to see you man. I was worried you'd died. How's Amina?"

Vickers returned the hug awkwardly. "She's worried about you dude." He pushed the smaller man off of him and held him at arms length as he looked at him.

There was something different about the young soldier. He could see it in his eyes and the way he looked back at the SEAL with a sort of tired wariness.

"What the hell happened?" Vickers asked, legitimately concerned.

Choi looked away uncertainly. "I kinda.... died again." He said after a few moments. "Like with the fire elemental. Only... I think I was a bit closer to the edge this time." He looked down at the ground and Vickers felt him shudder. "I thought the Miffy's had gotten you two too."

Suddenly Vickers knew what had happened to the young man.

"Jesus." He said as he began to notice the odd lines that were barely visible at various spots on Choi's face and neck. They looked like old scars. "You got intercepted didn't you?" He asked in awe. Suddenly he couldn't help but look Choi up and down again. "How are you alive?"

The elf cleared their throat noisily, and in a fashion that made it obvious it was just for attention. Vickers looked over and saw an odd light coming from the elf's forehead, and that its eyes were shut.

"Oh. Right." Choi said. "Vickers this is Kai. He's some kind of Spider Prince." He gestured at the elf, who nodded. "Kai this is Chief Vickers. Closest thing I have to a right hand man."

Vickers' eyebrows wrinkled as he scoffed a bit. "I am n-"

"Kai is the one that put me back together." Choi interrupted. "But there's worse than all this stuff Vickers."

Vickers looked back down at him. Choi met his gaze with an anger that was unexpected.

"They've got Muck Marchers. And they're using em." Choi said.

Vickers' jaw clenched as he heard the announcement.

"I know." He said. "Come on. We gotta warn your girl."

"Where is she?" Choi asked.

"Bringing the cavalry." Vickers replied.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ycnj4i/wait_is_this_just_gate_247/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (246/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y9aarm/wait_is_this_just_gate_245/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Battle buddies are always gonna be battle buddies. Even if antagonistic ones. *^(Halfhearted Hooah.)*

Enjoy.

Edit: God, there were some formatting issues with this one. Think I lost a few paragraphs. Let me know if anything looks iffy as a miffy.

\~

Driscoll entered the decontamination chamber with a clang as he closed the door. then he hit the blue pad with his armored hand, informing it that he was ready for the decon action to start.

A series of nozzles blasted him from all sides with alternating streams of boiling hot water and jets of high pressure air, cleaning the sand and other debris off of him and doing their best to sanitize his armor at the same time. Once they were done with their thirty second cycle a series of heat panels activated to dry him and kill off anything that remained. He watched patiently as the temperature outside the suit rose to nearly three hundred degrees and then remained there for another thirty seconds.

Once the cycle was complete the door on the wall in front of him opened and he stepped into a smaller room that had cold, air conditioned, air blasted right onto him. It cooled the exterior of his armor until it would be safe to touch.

Then he stepped into the sterilized room beyond and saw Rodriguez.

The Toolies, that was what they called their combination doctors and suit mechanics, were working on him in their inflated sterile room suits. One was slowly but surely laying down the fiber optic based panels that made up the interiors of their helmets. Each cell was less than three millimeters wide and hexagon shaped. They had to be layered in a specific pattern and order, and he knew it would take hours to even get half the display mapped.

The other Toolie was working on Rodriguez himself.

It had been more than five years since Driscoll had seen Rodriguez's body, such as it was, out of his suit. He looked down at his own armored

chest and wondered how long it had even been since he'd seen his own body.

Rodriguez was, like most of their crew, a lifer. He'd signed on for the experimental program because his only other option had been to spend his remaining days sitting in a hospital somewhere, letting machines do most of his living for him anyways. Like Driscoll, the military had given him an offer. To still be hooked up to machines, and dependent on them to live, but also to be ambulatory and capable of interacting with the world, even if through a mechanical filter. The other upside was that doing so would give him a chance to get back at the people that had put him in his condition in the first place.

Just like Driscoll, and so many others, Rodriguez had jumped at the opportunity.

Driscoll looked at the third of a body that was Rodriguez's entirety with shame. There were no arms, those had been reduced to stubs that ended just below his shoulder joints, each of them had a series of metal sensors embedded in them. His torso ended at an angle, the lower end of which stopped just below his left rib-cage, and the higher end of which was just below his right nipple. There was the standard interface collar, a mixture of steel braided cables and hoses layered over a metal plate, that plate was fastened to each side of his collar bone and shoulder blades, and had a series of plugs that ran up his back before going into the base of his skull.

Below the end of Rodriguez's torso was what all of them called the shit can. It was designed to look like a continuation of their bodies, for the sake of symmetry inside their suits. But there was no disguising the carbon nanotube reinforced mixture of metal and ceramic sections that, for all intents and purposes made up whatever organs they needed to live. In Rodriguez's case that consisted of his liver, a kidney that also doubled as an automatic oncocidal monitor/injector, one lung, and his entire gut. All of which were lab designed for efficiency, and grown with stem cells and REG-TEK cell recombination technology.

They called it the shit can because the one thing that each and every one of them had had replaced was their digestive system. That, and the fact that if the metal housing was ever breached or compromised, it was basically a death sentence for whoever it was attached to.

Luckily for Driscoll's shame that wasn't what had happened to Rodriguez.

He watched for a moment as the Toolie continued working on the two implants in the man's eye sockets. When the tech paused to grab a tool, Driscoll spoke up.

"Hey Rod." He said as he gingerly tapped a finger to the man's forehead.

"Boss?" Rodriguez asked as he lifted his head up to touch the finger in return. It was the only movement any of them were really capable of out of the suits, and so the traditional method of returning the greeting.

"Yeah." Driscoll replied. "How you doin?"

"Felt like takin' a walk. Gettin' some nice, fresh air. You know?" Rodriguez said with a grin. "Shame about the view."

And just like that Driscoll's tension eased. Rodriguez had always been the one person in the crew that could make any of the others cool down. He was, as far as the suits allowed, their big man. The guy they all looked to for reassuring words or a good laugh. Even Driscoll.

"What's the damage?" He asked.

"Pretty much what you see." Rodriguez replied with an attempted shrug. "Burns on my face, not that I was winning any beauty contests anyways. And my eyes. I'll be using the pinhole interface from here on out."

Driscoll nodded solemnly. He knew several other members of their force that had the same interface. It allowed them to see. But not the same way they'd been seeing their whole lives up until that point. Less like actual eyes and more like a simplified, permanent HUD. And only when they had their suit's helmet on.

He reached out and rubbed a knuckle on the man's sternum for a moment. Their equivalent of a hand on the shoulder for those who.... no longer had shoulders to speak of.

"I'm sorry." He said. "I-" He began.

"Don't be." Rodriguez cut him off. "It was a shit op, and some bad luck against an enemy we had no intel on. If I hadn't been rockin' the shotty and some fire shells I'd've probably tried the same thing." He said as he looked, so to speak, off to the side. "I was in the wrong spot at the wrong time and even with the suit's warning I didn't have the time to react. Noone would've."

Driscoll hung his head a bit. He knew that his friend was right. But it still didn't make him feel that much better.

"You want someone to blame?" Rodriguez continued. "Blame those fuckin' smart ass spiders." He said. "I mean... spiders dodging bullets? That's some bullshit."

Driscoll let out a quick, half hearted, laugh. "It is aint it?" He asked. He'd had more than his fair share of time to think of that too.

"Fuckin' hated spiders even before that fight." Rodriguez said with a look of disgust. "Now I really hate em."

"That's right." Driscoll said. "I remember that op in the Bering. You got scared of-"

"Fuck them king crabs man." Rodriguez cut him off with a shudder that made the nearby tech place a hand on his chest to still him. "Fuckin big ass spider motherfuckers with their big ass claws."

Driscoll full on bellowed laughter through his speakers. "You started stomping and chopping every crab that touched you. You churned up the water so bad our sensors started to have trouble finding you."

Rodriguez's eyebrows furrowed in anger even as he fought not to laugh himself.

"Like, the closest thing to being in a nightmare." He said. "And all in the black and green of my HUD. Fuckin' terrifying."

"They couldn't have hurt you if they'd wanted to." Driscoll reminded him as he continued laughing.

The two of them stayed like that for a minute. Driscoll laughing and Rodriguez shaking his head and trying to be angry at the memory.

Eventually they calmed down though. Rodriguez broke the ensuing silence first.

"Lost Mudder on that one." He said, his voice growing solemn. "Got caught under that sub when it drifted after we popped it."

Driscoll nodded. "Yeah." He said.

"Happens." Rodriguez said. Then he turned to try to look at Driscoll, though he was off by a few degrees. "But it didn't happen this time."

Driscoll nodded.

"Are you nodding?" Rodriguez asked. "You always nod. I can't see that shit dude."

"You're right." Driscoll said. "Still. Sorry bout the eyes."

"All good boss. Suit's still moving." Rodriguez said.

"Good." Driscoll shot back as he made to leave. "Better get back in it soon. Looks like a fight's comin'."

"On the double boss." Rodriguez replied. "Tell Doc to come see me. I know he got all pissy like he always does."

"Will do." Driscoll said as he stepped back into the decontamination room and closed the door behind him.

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"I must admit I was a touch skeptical when you told me that everyone dies of shock Mrs. Choi." Shrend said as he looked over the translated version of the text book she had been going over with the large minotaur and a few of his fellow healers. "Though, once you explained that you weren't talking about electricity, and that shock actually had a different meaning when it came to medicine it began to make more sense."

"It was one of the first things I was ever taught when I was becoming a paramedic many years ago." Margaret explained. "It's a vast oversimplification of what goes on in a dying body. But it is technically true."

Shrend nodded. "Now, I have seen this Ox-I-Jen mentioned many times in these books. And Arch-Mage Veliry tried to explain it to me once. Though, in her typical fashion, she spoke too fast for most of us to keep up."

Margaret nodded back. "She has that tendency doesn't she." She turned her English version of the book to its appendix to find the section on oxygenation. She was about to flip to the page in question when her son walked in.

"Hi mom." He said. "Hello Mr. Farstorm." He said with a wave.

"Mr. Choi." Shrend said with a smile. "Good to see you again. Is everything okay?"

Joey nodded. "Just here to see my mom. Someone said she was here."

"You know Mr. Shrend?" Margaret asked.

Joey nodded again. "I met him one of the first days we were allowed to move about freely. I couldn't help but introduce myself and ask him some questions." He said with just a hint of embarrassment.

"We were just going over the medical textbooks James had brought over." Margaret said as she pointed at the book resting on the meeting table in front of them. "Seeing if we can bridge the gap between Earth Science and Petravian Magic."

"Cool." Joey said as he looked at the book. He touched his finger to the page just under the chapter title before quickly pulling his hand back with a look of disgust. "Are you going to learn healing magic?" He asked.

"I uh..." She began with a confused look around the room. The other healers looked at her curiously. "I don't... know." She looked back at Shrend. "Can I?"

Shrend shrugged with a look of confusion himself. "I assumed that was part of why you wanted to work with us." He said simply. "To learn healing magic and see if your knowledge helped with it."

Joey bounced lightly on his feet as he placed a hand on her shoulder. "You should do it mom." He said excitedly. "Then we'll have an entire adventure party family. Amina as the tank. James as the half caster. Me as the mage. And you for healing."

She looked at him with her eyebrows knit in concern. "Joey I am NOT an adventurer." She said in a slightly frustrated tone. "And I do NOT know any magic."

"We can teach you." Said an older looking, short statured, woman at the table. "We are already teaching your ambassador healing magic. Though she hasn't had the results she was hoping for just yet."

Margaret turned to look at the speaker in shock. "Ambassador Werner is learning healing magic?" She asked. *I thought James said she was a cold b-word. Why would she want to learn healing magic.*

"Indeed." Shrend confirmed. "Though, I would be uncomfortable speaking of HER... reasoning." He said with a hint of venom as he emphasized the word while glaring at the other healers. "Without her permission."

Margaret nodded. "I see that patient confidentiality is a thing here too." She said. Shrend nodded "Good."

"I will tell you that she is here though." Shrend said. "She's in a lesson right now. Would you care to meet her? Maybe she can help you learn healing magic. Since she would likely have had a similar starting point to you."

"Do it mom." Joey said as he continued bouncing.

"I... I guess." She said as she started to stand up.

I guess I'm learning magic now too. She thought, slightly irritated at the idea. *I'm too old to be back in school.*

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"James." Kai said softly as he nudged James's shoulder.

"Hmm?" James grumbled as he faded back into wakefulness.

"Wake up. We are only a few minutes away from the surface."

"Already?" James said as he yawned and straightened out his legs to stretch.

"It has been three hours since last we spoke." Kai said in response. "Another few hundred meters and we should be back roughly where you were retrieved by the dwarves. Though my spiders tell me that that position is guarded, so we are emerging a few dozen yards away.

James slowly gained his feet, stretching his back as he rolled to an upright standing position. He jammed his arms out ramrod straight, the muscles tensing as he yawned again and rolled his hands around in a slow, shaky, circular motion.

"You ready for this?" He asked as he double checked his newly rebuilt weapons. He shook the sleep out with a quick crack of his neck. "Can you go on the surface?" James wondered.

Kai nodded. "I can. So long as I return before nightfall."

James looked at him curiously.

Kai peered at James's left arm. "The same god that granted you that arm happens to be an enemy of the god that granted me MY powers." He said sternly.

James looked at the wolf arm for a moment. Then nodded understanding.

"Fuck em all. Right?" He said.

Kai thought for a moment, then nodded once. James watched as he pulled the harp over his arm like he had when he'd been fighting the Muck Marchers.... how many days ago now?

Kai's left hand reached out and the many-eyed mask glided into his hand. Instead of placing the mask on his face Kai pulled a single gem from it and then placed it on his belt. He took the single, slightly green, gem and pressed it to his forehead. James watched as the flesh there parted with a barely audible pop. Then the gem settled in place and began glowing.

He could ask questions later, he hoped. Before them, a bit of rock crumbled away from the ceiling and sand began to pour into the tunnel before a spray of webs crossed underneath the opening and halted the flow. A wave of spiders skittered up the walls and across the ceiling and made quick work of moving the sand aside and creating a vertical shaft large enough for their platform.

"Not to offend or anything." James said. "But I just thought you should know that I'm really scared of spiders."

Kai turned and raised an eyebrow. James noticed that the eyes beneath were both sealed shut. Then the elf turned back to the opening as their platform began moving again.

"Noted." He said as they began to rise.

"Remember." James said just as they were about to emerge into the daylight. "Only kill if you have to."

Kai nodded. "I'll try." He said.

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Vickers was only ten yards away from the two lackadaisical soldiers now. He'd spent nearly three hours crossing the desert between his former position and their canopy in small bursts of movement that at times only resulted in inches of gained ground.

Neither of the young soldiers, a specialist and a corporal, had seen him somehow. He wanted to be proud of his training and take credit for being as proficient in stealth as he was. But at some point it stopped being a matter of his skill and more a sign of THEIR incompetence.

For god's sake, this was an empty desert. How had neither of them seen the moving mound of scrub brush and odd looking sand slowly making its way closer? They were, for all purposes, on an alien world. How were they not being more observant.

He was about to make his move, hitting them with a few of the green polymer training rounds that he'd taken from Choi without the young captain knowing. It would beat them up, and shock them off foot, allowing him to close the last few yards and neutralize them easily.

Then something entirely unexpected happened.

The sand beneath him began to rumble softly, vibrating and shifting under him in a way that made his position feel unstable. The two guards seemed to notice too as they both shot to their feet. The one whose rifle had been slung to the canopy retrieved it and checked its safety.

Then Vickers saw something he never could have expected.

Some two dozen yards away Choi appeared, standing next to a tall, midnight black elf. The two of them burst from the ground as if they were part of a magician's stage act.

And they were surrounded by an explosion of moving creatures that made Vickers' skin crawl as he realized what they were.

"Fucking spiders?" He asked under his breath.

The two soldiers seemed to be in a similar state of distress.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" One of them yelled as they raised their weapon to fire.

Something blurred and suddenly the soldier was falling to the ground, their weapon knocked out of their hands as they fell unconscious from some unseen impact.

Vickers watched as Choi recovered the chain weapon, though he also noticed that it looked different. Choi had a look of shocked concern on his face.

The other soldier, the one that hadn't checked his weapon, attempted to fire. The weapon didn't report and they began looking at it. They had forgotten their safety switch.

Before they could correct the mistake a mass of spiders was engulfing them.

Vickers watched in horror as the soldier was quickly rolled across the sand, screaming the entire time. After a few moments the screams were muffled and the swarm of spiders parted to show the soldier bundled as though they were being saved for later. Their mouth was covered in web. Though, not the rest of their face.

Then Vickers saw the swarm turn towards him.

"Oh. Fuck!" He said as he burst to his feet. Rifle held above his head in one hand. "CHOI!" He yelled.

The spiders were only a few feet away.

"CHOIIIII!!!!!" He yelled again, louder.

Choi reached over to the elf and shook their shoulder. His head tilted to the side and Vickers ripped the ghillie covering off of his face.

"Vickers?" Choi asked. "What are you doing here?"

Vickers looked down at the mass of differently colored arachnids. They'd stopped only inches away from him. He resisted the urge to shake a large red and green one off of his boot as it peered up at him.

"What am I doin' here?" He shot back, suddenly angry at how scared he'd just been. "WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?"

The elf looked at Choi curiously. Choi held a hand up as he looked back. "He's cool Kai. He's.... a friend."

Vickers breathed a sigh of relief as the spiders began to draw back.

"As you say." The elf said.

Choi quickly jogged over to the soldier that he'd attacked with his chain, who Vickers now noticed was also bundled like an insect, and reached down to touch the man's neck. After a few moments he nodded.

"Oh thank god." He said as Vickers slowly, and uncertainly, walked over to meet him. "I thought I'd killed him."

"Choi." Vickers said. "What the hell's going on?" He pointed at the elf. "Who the hell is that? And why the FUCK!... did I almost become spider food?"

"Right." Choi said as he stood up and, in a move that surprised Vickers, wrapped him in a hug. "It is so good to see you man. I was worried you'd died. How's Amina?"

Vickers returned the hug awkwardly. "She's worried about you dude." He pushed the smaller man off of him and held him at arms length as he looked at him.

There was something different about the young soldier. He could see it in his eyes and the way he looked back at the SEAL with a sort of tired wariness.

"What the hell happened?" Vickers asked, legitimately concerned.

Choi looked away uncertainly. "I kinda.... died again." He said after a few moments. "Like with the fire elemental. Only... I think I was a bit

closer to the edge this time." He looked down at the ground and Vickers felt him shudder. "I thought the Miffy's had gotten you two too."

Suddenly Vickers knew what had happened to the young man.

"Jesus." He said as he began to notice the odd lines that were barely visible at various spots on Choi's face and neck. They looked like old scars. "You got intercepted didn't you?" He asked in awe. Suddenly he couldn't help but look Choi up and down again. "How are you alive?"

The elf cleared their throat noisily, and in a fashion that made it obvious it was just for attention. Vickers looked over and saw an odd light coming from the elf's forehead, and that its eyes were shut.

"Oh. Right." Choi said. "Vickers this is Kai. He's some kind of Spider Prince." He gestured at the elf, who nodded. "Kai this is Chief Vickers. Closest thing I have to a right hand man."

Vickers' eyebrows wrinkled as he scoffed a bit. "I am n-"

"Kai is the one that put me back together." Choi interrupted. "But there's worse than all this stuff Vickers."

Vickers looked back down at him. Choi met his gaze with an anger that was unexpected.

"They've got Muck Marchers. And they're using em." Choi said.

Vickers' jaw clenched as he heard the announcement.

"I know." He said. "Come on. We gotta warn your girl."

"Where is she?" Choi asked.

"Bringing the cavalry." Vickers replied.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (245/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y8bcb4/wait_is_this_just_gate_244/)

Writer's note: And so we begin to see things draw together. James has just a tiny bit of PTSD, in case that hasn't been obvious these past few chapters. Getting killed for like.... the twentieth time, will do that to a guy.

But guess what. So does our favorite Bostonian.

Enjoy.

\~

As James and Kai slowly floated through the tunnels on the piece of webbed stone that served as a moving platform, James thought of the weapon that rested in its new scabbard under his hand. Kai stood nearby playing his control harp in a pattern that wasn't QUITE a melody, though James had noticed several repeating patterns.

"It's good." Wry'Mis had said as he'd studied the final result with a series of alternating lens goggles. "It's got some changes from the original pattern that the pieces had. Could be ACTUAL changes, or it could just be things we couldn't see because of how weak it had been."

He looked down at the short sword in his hand as the spiders moved he and Kai along, clearing their own webs and any rubble out of their way as the platform ascended through the deep dark at an upward angle. Occasionally they would pause as the spiders found a thin wall between passageways and burrowed their way through it to shorten the trip.

It's blade was no longer the dark grayish blue that it had been before. Instead it was a multicolored array of darkness that even the prismatic light of the scant crystals on their platform couldn't confuse. There were several spots where lines of the original color shone through, they marked where the blade had been pressed and forged back together. The rest of it was a patchy oil-sheen-esque array of different hues, altering between a dark blood red, a slightly glimmering purple, and a dark jade green.

"What do you mean?" He'd asked the enchanter.

"Well." Wry'Mis had said. "We knew that getting it EXACTLY the same would be next to impossible. And we we're right. It's enchantment has been.... not changed... not exactly. But you held the enchantment together based on everything you knew of it. Used the impression it's left on your soul as the mould by which it's been recast."

"So.... what? It's a copy?" James asked.

"More or less." Sary'on had chimed in. "Think of it like this. You have a house that you've lived in for years. You know every hall and doorway like a muscle memory. You know when you walk down the stairs which one will creak and how that creak will sound before you even step on them. You know how a certain door sticks no matter how many times you grease it."

James had nodded. His mother's house had a window that always sounded like it farted whenever it hinged open. He and Joey had always giggled any time it had done so.

"Now imagine that one day your house gets destroyed." Sary'on had said. "You salvage as much of it as you can, and replace the bits that you can't. And you set about rebuilding it as it was."

James had nodded again. "Got it." He'd said. "Sometimes the stair doesn't squeak. Or the door doesn't stick anymore."

"And sometimes it's for the better." Wry'Mis had chimed in. "Sometimes not. That step not squeaking might let a robber get in unheard. But that door not sticking might also let you escape the robber more easily."

"Now." Sary'on had begun. "What do you want to do about the handle?"

James examined the new handle. It was simultaneously simpler looking, and yet infinitely more devious than the original. It was only large enough for a single hand now, and ended in a weighty pommel that had one of the softly glowing crystals on both sides of it.

At the end of the pommel was a small, but sturdy, steel ring.

"You should rest." Kai said. "It will only take a few more hours before we're back at the surface."

James looked at the elf with weary eyes. He could use some sleep he supposed. But too much had gone on without him. He still didn't know what had happened with Vickers and Amina.

Had they rushed after him and met the same fate, but with nobody to retrieve them and bring them back to health?

Had they been captured?

Had they somehow destroyed what had to have been a full military FOB and started the first Inter-Dimensional war? He had no way of knowing.

"You sure you want to come with me?" He asked.

Kai didn't so much as hesitate.

"Of course." He said simply. "I saved your life. It is my responsibility to ensure that that life is not wasted. Or used for nefarious reasons." He said flatly. "Besides. I am still quite angry about what happened to the dwarves. They did not deserve their fate at the hands of these... Muck Marchers." He dipped his head a bit. "Besides. How often does a person, even a long lived elf, get to help someone as important as the Summoned Hero?"

James's head slumped a bit at the mention of his title as he listened to the elf.

Then Kai's tone shifted as he muttered to himself.

"They must learn the trapped fly's fear." He said in a barely audible growl.

James peered over at the slightly scowling elf warily as he heard the angry oath.

After a few minutes of awkward silence James sat down on one of the slightly raised rocks on the platform.

"By the way." He started as he rested his arms on the new chain wrapped around his chest using it as a sort of sling. It wasn't as thick as the last chain. But Sary'on had assured him that it was even tougher. And she said that she'd had Wry'Mis put a few enchantments on his handle before they'd attached the two to each other."What are you?" James asked.

Kai raised an eyebrow.

"I take it that you're not confused about my species." He replied flatly.

James shook his head. "What's a 'Prince of Eyes'?" He asked. "And who is this 'Prince of Webs' that the two guards asked about?"

Kai nodded curtly.

"In the Deep Dark there are monsters and devils and other entities that the surface is not prepared to face." Kai said in a trembling, half whispered way, as though recalling a dream or perhaps a nightmare.

Having faced the blight and its hordes, James wondered about the validity of the statement.

"Life down here is difficult. Dangerous. Those who aren't vigilant can be lost in the space of a heartbeat." Kai continued. "When my people fled the surface countless aeons ago we lost many. To the darkness, AND to the things lurking within it. We made the first fortress towns. Like the one we were just in. But they were few and far between. Some of those fell to the nightmares. Their numbers too vast, and strength too great for my people to fight on their own."

James listened intently even as his eyelids began fighting gravity. He wondered if Grabber Clans had caused some of those losses.

"So we begged the very gods that had forced us to flee in the first place." Kai said. "Only one would listen. And the great irony of it was that it was the Darkness. That great shadow that had been the very thing plaguing us in our new refuges." He held the harp up and stared at it even as he continued using it to move them along. "Darkness promised my people that they would be remade for this new life. And that every generation, guardians would arise. Chosen by the Deep Dark itself to defend us. Twelve of us there would be. And each would command the hordes of the darkness in masses great enough to control hundreds of miles, thousands even, of tunnels and caverns."

Kai's head dropped down even as James's began to loll to the side. He thought he saw the elf shudder.

"Never to know rest or peace." Kai said so softly that James almost couldn't hear it.

"Says who?" James asked, startling the suddenly gloomy elf out of his reverie.

Kai looked at him. Then his eyes seemed to dart around as a susurration of noise seemed to emanate from around the platform. Kai grimaced as his harp began to twang violently without his interference. James heard chittering from all around them, and he thought he knew the answer to the question.

"We all reside in webs of our own weaving." Kai said as he violently ran his fingers across the strings of the instrument with a manic look on his face. "I'm just one of the few who acknowledges the strings."

There were screeches and the sounds of some wet... things.... bursting in the dark. The noise was hard to describe as their platform seemed to shake violently for a moment.

Then Kai brushed a stand of hair away from his face as he stood up to his full height again, and the platform resumed its normal movement.

"Rest James." He said as he turned to face the tunnel in front of them, leaving James behind him. "We'll be there soon."

James slid down until the rock was propping his back up and tried to heed the advice. But the sounds of, what he assumed was the spiders around them revolting against Kai's doubts, made it hard for him to do so despite his weariness.

Still; a soldier can sleep anywhere if they need to, and after a few minutes of watching the dark around them suspiciously James faded into sleep. His dreams were full of hairy legs, beady eyes, and sharp fangs.

In his sleep he unconsciously gripped at the handles to both his new sword, and the new chain.

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Driscoll was greeted by the stern, unforgiving, glare of the Major as his suit jumped out of the hole in the desert sand.

"Major." He said simply.

"Bit overdue." She replied coldly. "Got a good reason?" She asked as she turned to walk away.

Driscoll matched her pace. "No." He replied just as coldly.

She glanced sidelong at him. But after a moment she moved on. Driscoll smiled behind his reflective face plate. She may have had the rank here. But they both knew that he didn't REALLY answer to her. As always, power resided with the person who could actually bring it to bear. And there weren't many settings where that didn't mean him. He glanced at the rear camera feed on his display and looked at the hole as they left it behind. It robbed the smile from his face.

"You looked at what I sent you?" She asked.

"Of course." He said. "Any sign of them?"

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"How many?" He asked.

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Driscoll did some mental math. "Impressive for only a few weeks work." He said.

"Vickers did say that this country's military, and communication methods, were more efficient than we might expect." She said.

Driscoll nodded. "Plan?" He asked.

The major looked over at him warily for a second, as if unsure of him. He stopped walking and moved so that his faceplate was centered on her. It was a habit that he and his kind had learned to imitate a stare, and had a habit of unnerving most people.

She stopped in her tracks only a step later and didn't even turn back to look at him. She seemed to think for a moment.

"We learned from the fight when you were first sent over." She began. "These people are more than capable of holding their own against conventional human forces. Their physical prowess makes them more than a match for a standard soldier."

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Under his helmet Driscoll scowled.

"MAGIC...." She continued. "Is a game changer." She finally turned back to him. "And with Vickers seemingly on their side, they will know that."

"It hasn't stopped us yet." Driscoll said venomously.

"Hasn't it?" She asked as she turned and began walking again. "You should check in with Rodriguez. He'll be happy to.... SEE... you."

Driscoll chewed his lip as he watched her leave.

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Several hundred yards away, nestled into the side of a dune under his ghillie cloak, Vickers sat watching the two people in a cold sweat. And it wasn't just the gently flowing magic that made it cold.

Vickers looked at them in his scope, the barrel of his rifle just barely protruding from the sand.

The fact that there had been a full military FOB, complete with Miffy's for defense, had been bad enough. The cold blooded Major that he'd spoke to days before had been another tick on the bad side of the equation.

Now he had seen Muck Marchers.

As a Navy SEAL Vickers was probably one of the few people out there who knew just how dangerous the cyborgs were. In fact, he was one of the few people who knew for a fact that they were IN FACT cyborgs. He'd been on more than his fair share of ops that had been in conjunction with Deep Strike forces, or whatever their official name was. He'd seen the armored cyborgs emerge from the water, or mud, or shadows as efficiently as any of his people could. But he'd also seen them walk through walls of intercepting enemy fire as if it was just a slight downpour. Their armor protecting them from the incoming rounds as easily as if they weren't there. Hell, he'd seen one muck marcher take an old pre-war model RPG to the gut and thought they were dead. Then only a week later had seen the same Muck Marcher walk into an enemy compound with a semi automatic shotgun and clean house.

Or, more accurately, he'd been moving to secure a compound when the Muck Marcher in question had emerged from it covered in soot, ricochet marks, and enemy blood. It had been one of the few times in Vickers' military career where he'd looked at someone who was, at least ostensibly, on his side and been afraid.

So what were they doing here? HOW could they be here? He wondered, as he watched the two figures crest a dune and continue on toward the base, suddenly glad that he was so far away. Had that one sensed him there? He THOUGHT he could avoid the sensors of the Miffy's. But he had NO idea whether he could avoid detection by a Muck Marcher. He had no idea what kind of sensor suites those things even had.

Wait. He thought. *How did that one just pop up out of the ground like that?*

He panned his rifle scope slowly towards where the armored figure had popped out of the ground. He'd done so in a similar fashion to how Vickers had seen them land themselves on enemy docks after bursting from the water.

Can they move through the sand the same way they can move through the water? He wondered with a mounting sense of dread. If so than Amina and the other Petravians were already dead and just didn't know it.

No. He realized. There was something there. The sand in that spot was indented oddly, and as he switched over to infrared he saw a large difference in temperature there. It was colder, and he could see cold air occasionally flow out of it before the heat of the desert whisked it away.

There's gotta be some kind of opening there. He realized. *But what were they doing down there?*

He looked around, surveying the area to see if anyone else was there. Then he had a chilling thought.

That void that was hiding when I spoke to the Major. He realized. He didn't know how he knew it. But the new information made him certain. *It was one of them.* He shuddered. *They could have taken me whenever they wanted.*

After a few minutes of ensuring that the area was more or less empty, Vickers began to slowly inch his way toward the opening in the ground. It still had a few soldiers sitting in chairs near it under a small canopy. One of them was eating what he assumed was part of an MRE. But they were just ordinary soldiers. One of them even had their rifle hanging from one of the legs of the canopy, as if it were a jacket or hat.

A couple amateurs. He thought. *So a little motion out here shouldn't set off any sensors.*

Vickers continued slowly inching forward.

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"Are you sure I can't go with you?" Joey asked as he helped Veliry pack her things into the bottomless bag that matched her robes.

"No Joey." She said with surprising firmness. "You're still only an apprentice. And this is a dangerous situation."

"But. James is in trouble." He replied. "I wanna help."

She took a deep breath as she finished placing a bundle of glowing rocks into a sack and stuffed it into her bag.

"I know." She said. "But it's not safe for you. It's not even safe for me. And I promised your mother AND James that I wouldn't let you get hurt." She picked up an orb that looked like it was made of pink glass, it let off small firework-like sparks when she touched it. She looked at it for a moment then decided against bringing it and set it down. "Besides. This will also be a good chance to test our new discovery over

long distances. I'll need you here to ensure it works on this end. You remember the signal right?"

Joey nodded eagerly. "You'll throw a signal stone through." He said. "Then we'll send Sergeant Marius through to assess the situation."

Veliry nodded. "Good." She said. "With any luck it will simply be a successful test. But... It could also end up saving our lives."

"What should I do while I wait for everyone to come back?" He asked.

"Marcos can lead you in your studies if you'd like." She replied. "I know he's not terribly exciting to listen to. But he is still an incredibly knowledgeable mage. And an expert on fields that I struggle with." She said, not mentioning how similar Joey's explanation of learning had resembled the reason she also struggled with those subjects. "Just no using necromancy. You'll end up enslaved by a demon."

Joey's eyes went wide. "There's necromancy?" He wondered softly to himself. "That's not good."

Suddenly Veliry wrapped her arms around him in a hug, breaking him out of his thought process. She made it a quick one, knowing how uncomfortable he was with unexpected contact.

"You've made incredible progress. But be safe with your studies." She said with a raised finger. "Take your mother out into the capital or something." She said as she began flying toward the door. Then she seemed to remember something and turned to the door. "Door." She said.

"Yes madame Veliry?" It asked.

"Joseph Choi is allowed provisional entry to the laboratory while I'm gone." She turned back to look at him. "For ACADEMIC PURPOSES ONLY." She said as he avoided eye contact. "And he is not to stay here over night, or for more than four hours at a time. Understood?"

"YES." Both Joey and the door said in unison. Joey pursed his lips in a pout. Four hours was when his phone alarms went off to remind him to take care of himself.

"Joey." Said Veliry in a much happier tone.

He looked up at her. "Yeah?"

"Don't slack off while I'm gone." She said with a smile. "If you get that fire spell figured out before I get back we'll move onto the deathbolts."

Joey smiled back.

Then she flew past the hidden door and out of sight.

He looked out one of the side windows, past a jar with what looked like a three headed dragon fetus in it that she'd never explained. He saw her a moment later as she emerged from the side entrance to one of the balconies. She landed for a moment.

Then she began flying away on the magically created jet thrusters that she and his brother had figured out only a few weeks ago. Several other royal mages struggled to keep up using different methods of flight.

Joey's eyes bulged as he saw one on what he was fairly certain was a magic carpet.

Then they were gone into the sky.

He turned back and looked at the books he'd left on the table the day before. He focused his energy, drawing it in from everything around him. His clothes fluttered for a moment and he had to fight not to use the wind magic.

He had other ideas in mind. And in magic, ideas were what mattered.

He held his hand out, fingers splayed like so many movies he'd watched as a child. He focused on reaching out with the energy.

The book began to rattle as he focused more and more on it.

It leapt into the air a few inches and looked almost like it was going to head towards him. He smiled with excitement.

Then there was a loud ripping noise and the two halves of the book slid off the table in different directions, one of them knocking over a glass of water as it went.

Joey peeked over and saw a series of eyes form on the door, peering around the room to find the source of the disturbance. The uncanny visage made him even more uncomfortable than normal people's faces did and he quickly set about cleaning his mess.

I'll get that sooner or later. He thought as he examined the ruined book. *Hopefully sooner.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ya3ikq/wait_is_this_just_gate_246/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (245/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y8b81i/wait_is_this_just_gate_244/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

*Writer's note: And so we begin to see things draw together. James has just a tiny bit of PTSD, in case that hasn't been obvious these past few

chapters. Getting killed for like.... the twentieth time, will do that to a guy.*

But guess what. So does our favorite Bostonian.

Enjoy.

\~

As James and Kai slowly floated through the tunnels on the piece of webbed stone that served as a moving platform, James thought of the weapon that rested in its new scabbard under his hand. Kai stood nearby playing his control harp in a pattern that wasn't QUITE a melody, though James had noticed several repeating patterns.

"It's good." Wry'Mis had said as he'd studied the final result with a series of alternating lens goggles. "It's got some changes from the original pattern that the pieces had. Could be ACTUAL changes, or it could just be things we couldn't see because of how weak it had been."

He looked down at the short sword in his hand as the spiders moved he and Kai along, clearing their own webs and any rubble out of their way as the platform ascended through the deep dark at an upward angle. Occasionally they would pause as the spiders found a thin wall between passageways and burrowed their way through it to shorten the trip.

It's blade was no longer the dark grayish blue that it had been before. Instead it was a multicolored array of darkness that even the prismatic light of the scant crystals on their platform couldn't confuse. There were several spots where lines of the original color shone through, they marked where the blade had been pressed and forged back together. The rest of it was a patchy oil-sheen-esque array of different hues, altering between a dark blood red, a slightly glimmering purple, and a dark jade green.

"What do you mean?" He'd asked the enchanter.

"Well." Wry'Mis had said. "We knew that getting it EXACTLY the same would be next to impossible. And we we're right. It's enchantment has been.... not changed... not exactly. But you held the enchantment together based on everything you knew of it. Used the impression it's left on your soul as the mould by which it's been recast."

"So.... what? It's a copy?" James asked.

"More or less." Sary'on had chimed in. "Think of it like this. You have a house that you've lived in for years. You know every hall and doorway like a muscle memory. You know when you walk down the stairs which one will creak and how that creak will sound before you even step on them. You know how a certain door sticks no matter how many times you grease it."

James had nodded. His mother's house had a window that always sounded like it farted whenever it hinged open. He and Joey had always giggled any time it had done so.

"Now imagine that one day your house gets destroyed." Sary'on had said. "You salvage as much of it as you can, and replace the bits that you can't. And you set about rebuilding it as it was."

James had nodded again. "Got it." He'd said. "Sometimes the stair doesn't squeak. Or the door doesn't stick anymore."

"And sometimes it's for the better." Wry'Mis had chimed in. "Sometimes not. That step not squeaking might let a robber get in unheard. But that door not sticking might also let you escape the robber more easily."

"Now." Sary'on had begun. "What do you want to do about the handle?"

James examined the new handle. It was simultaneously simpler looking, and yet infinitely more devious than the original. It was only large enough for a single hand now, and ended in a weighty pommel that had one of the softly glowing crystals on both sides of it.

At the end of the pommel was a small, but sturdy, steel ring.

"You should rest." Kai said. "It will only take a few more hours before we're back at the surface."

James looked at the elf with weary eyes. He could use some sleep he supposed. But too much had gone on without him. He still didn't know what had happened with Vickers and Amina.

Had they rushed after him and met the same fate, but with nobody to retrieve them and bring them back to health?

Had they been captured?

Had they somehow destroyed what had to have been a full military FOB and started the first Inter-Dimensional war? He had no way of knowing.

"You sure you want to come with me?" He asked.

Kai didn't so much as hesitate.

"Of course." He said simply. "I saved your life. It is my responsibility to ensure that that life is not wasted. Or used for nefarious reasons." He said flatly. "Besides. I am still quite angry about what happened to the dwarves. They did not deserve their fate at the hands of these... Muck Marchers." He dipped his head a bit. "Besides. How often does a person, even a long lived elf, get to help someone as important as the Summoned Hero?"

James's head slumped a bit at the mention of his title as he listened to the elf.

Then Kai's tone shifted as he muttered to himself.

^("They must learn the trapped fly's fear.") He said in a barely audible growl.

James peered over at the slightly scowling elf warily as he heard the angry oath.

After a few minutes of awkward silence James sat down on one of the slightly raised rocks on the platform.

"By the way." He started as he rested his arms on the new chain wrapped around his chest using it as a sort of sling. It wasn't as thick as the last chain. But Sary'on had assured him that it was even tougher. And she said that she'd had Wry'Mis put a few enchantments on his handle before they'd attached the two to each other."What are you?" James asked.

Kai raised an eyebrow.

"I take it that you're not confused about my species." He replied flatly.

James shook his head. "What's a 'Prince of Eyes'?" He asked. "And who is this 'Prince of Webs' that the two guards asked about?"

Kai nodded curtly.

"In the Deep Dark there are monsters and devils and other entities that the surface is not prepared to face." Kai said in a trembling, half whispered way, as though recalling a dream or perhaps a nightmare.

Having faced the blight and its hordes, James wondered about the validity of the statement.

"Life down here is difficult. Dangerous. Those who aren't vigilant can be lost in the space of a heartbeat." Kai continued. "When my people fled the surface countless aeons ago we lost many. To the darkness, AND to the things lurking within it. We made the first fortress towns. Like the one we were just in. But they were few and far between. Some of those fell to the nightmares. Their numbers too vast, and strength too great for my people to fight on their own."

James listened intently even as his eyelids began fighting gravity. He wondered if Grabber Clans had caused some of those losses.

"So we begged the very gods that had forced us to flee in the first place." Kai said. "Only one would listen. And the great irony of it was that it was the Darkness. That great shadow that had been the very thing plaguing us in our new refuges." He held the harp up and stared at it even as he continued using it to move them along. "Darkness promised my people that they would be remade for this new life. And that every generation, guardians would arise. Chosen by the Deep Dark itself to defend us. Twelve of us there would be. And each would command the hordes of the darkness in masses great enough to control hundreds of miles, thousands even, of tunnels and caverns."

Kai's head dropped down even as James's began to loll to the side. He thought he saw the elf shudder.

^("Never to know rest or peace.") Kai said so softly that James almost couldn't hear it.

"Says who?" James asked, startling the suddenly gloomy elf out of his reverie.

Kai looked at him. Then his eyes seemed to dart around as a susurration of noise seemed to emanate from around the platform. Kai grimaced as his harp began to twang violently without his interference. James heard chittering from all around them, and he thought he knew the answer to the question.

"We all reside in webs of our own weaving." Kai said as he violently ran his fingers across the strings of the instrument with a manic look on his face. "I'm just one of the few who acknowledges the strings."

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It leapt into the air a few inches and looked almost like it was going to head towards him. He smiled with excitement.

Then there was a loud ripping noise and the two halves of the book slid off the table in different directions, one of them knocking over a glass of water as it went.

Joey peeked over and saw a series of eyes form on the door, peering around the room to find the source of the disturbance. The uncanny visage made him even more uncomfortable than normal people's faces did and he quickly set about cleaning his mess.

I'll get that sooner or later. He thought as he examined the ruined book. *Hopefully sooner.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ya3hn8/wait_is_this_just_gate_246/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (244/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y7g9sn/wait_is_this_just_gate_243/)

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Then the commander of the newly arrived unit cleared his throat to get her attention. She turned to face him.

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But it was the only real chance they had of getting the blade back to some semblance of wholeness. And even with James focusing on the enchantment, there was a high chance that the blade would never behave QUITE the same way as it had before. It certainly wouldn't be the same shape. Instead he'd opted for a slightly shorter, narrower form. More akin to a Roman Gladius than to the long straight two handed sword it had been before.

As he and the dark elf blacksmith hammered away at the metal, forging the pieces back together and reshaping them at the same time, he focused on his memories of the blade.

He remembered how, in his early days with it, it had practically pulled him off his feet. How it had drawn him across the castle's training yard in massive bounds toward Amina as she shot lances of fire at him. How it had clanged off of her own relic shield as it had automatically defended her from his attack because he hadn't been in complete control of the weapon.

How, after he'd killed the Grinner, Veliry and Marcos had used Necromancy in the middle of the night. He and Amina had woken up from the nightmares that that had caused because both the sword and her shield had been rattling loudly while trying to protect them from what they viewed as danger. How it had shaken and rattled for hours as the foul interrogation had continued many floors below their room, and he and Amina had lain there holding each other through the sleepless, terror inducing, night.

He remembered flying through the Elemental that had destroyed the capital, letting the blade drink in the magical fire it was made of as he spun his way through what would inevitably become one of the most scarring experiences of his life.

How it had saved him from the golems that the Agency had sent to him. Each thrust and stab and slash causing gobbets of blood-stone to sizzle and dry and become useless to the disgusting blob-like creatures.

Most importantly, he remembered how drawing the blade in a fight had become so instinctive to him. How it had become like an extension of his arm. The same way his pistol had over the years, and even more so since coming to this world. It had felt like a part of him, and in a way it HAD become a part of him.

Sary'on had explained that if a person used a soul-forged item long enough, even if they weren't the creator of it, it would bond to them. How it would entangle itself in the person's soul. Not as effectively as the person it had been created for originally. But it still became bonded to them. When he'd explained the sense of loss he'd felt while holding its pieces, she had confirmed that his feelings were not entirely inaccurate.

The concept reminded him of the bond he had with Steve.

It was these thoughts that he focused on as he poured magical energy down through his arms, out of his hands, and into the blade as the blacksmith hammered away at it.

"Adjust!" She yelled again, breaking him out of his thoughts as he rotated the blade again.

Several more hours they worked like that. On into what James felt was becoming night, though he couldn't tell in the crystal and fungus lit darkness of the fortress town. Eventually he had to switch the tongs over to his wolf arm, as his human arm began to cramp and strain with the force necessary to keep the burning hot metal in place.

But he never dropped it, and never let the memories of the Mage's Blade stop flowing through his mind.

Once the blade was shaped and heated to near white hot levels Kai came forward with a a trough of some strange liquid that glowed a faint blue color.

Sary'on looked at him in amazement. "Soul Harvester milk?" She asked in awe.

James simply held the blade impatiently.

"If we're going to reforge something of that quality." Kai said simply as he set the trough down with a twang of his instrument. "We might as well do it correctly."

"Guys." James said with a hint of upset.

"Oh. Of course." Sary'on said as she remembered what was happening. She gestured at the trough.

James rushed forward and dunked the blade in the strange liquid. It let out a hiss that almost sounded like a scream. The liquid was like a thick gel and it slowly filled in the gap that the hot blade had pressed into it.

James cringed as he smelled the awful stench of the liquid as it steamed from the heat.

"Oh!" He exclaimed, not letting go of the tongs. "What the fuck?"

"Right." Kai said as a cloth veil wove itself across his nose and mouth. "I should have warned about the stench."

"Ugh. Ya think?" James said as he struggled to breath through his mouth.

The smell was like burnt hair, old vomit, and the faintly rotten smell of a garbage can on a hot day.

Despite this, Sary'on practically had her head in the liquid as she watched the blade rapidly cool. Once it had cooled adequately she gestured for James to pull it out. He did and she grabbed a towel and a file. She wiped the now blackened goop of of the side of the blade and ran the file down its still dull edge.

It made a long, raspy, note that reverberated despite the blade being held in two separate places.

"Oh, and she slides like a beauty." The blacksmith said with a wicked Grin. "Come on!" She said excitedly as she pulled the blade, and James along with it, over to the table where Wry'mis was waiting.

"Now the hard part humie." Said the grey dwarf. James ignored what he assumed was meant as some kind of light insult. "Hope you got all that magical memory energy in it right."

James nodded sternly.

"Then let's get enchanting." The dwarf said with a crazy look in his eyes.

Kai and Sary'on stood back and watched in amazement as magical energy began to flow from the blade into the table that it had been set upon.

And the two casters began to work.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y9ad5m/wait_is_this_just_gate_245/)

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He remembered how, in his early days with it, it had practically pulled him off his feet. How it had drawn him across the castle's training yard in massive bounds toward Amina as she shot lances of fire at him. How it had clanged off of her own relic shield as it had automatically defended her from his attack because he hadn't been in complete control of the weapon.

How, after he'd killed the Grinner, Veliry and Marcos had used Necromancy in the middle of the night. He and Amina had woken up from the nightmares that had been interrupted because both the sword and her shield had been rattling loudly while trying to protect them from what they viewed as danger. How it had shaken and rattled for hours as the foul interrogation had continued many floors below their room, and he and Amina had lain there holding each other through the sleepless, terror inducing, night.

He remembered flying through the Elemental that had destroyed the capital, letting the blade drink in the magical fire it was made of as he spun his way through what would inevitably become one of the most scarring experiences of his life.

How it had saved him from the golems that the Agency had sent to him. Each thrust and stab and slash causing gobbets of blood-stone to sizzle and dry and become useless to the disgusting blob-like creatures.

Most importantly, he remembered how drawing the blade in a fight had become so instinctive to him. How it had become like an extension of his arm. The same way his pistol had over the years, and even more so since coming to this world. It had felt like a part of him, and in a way it HAD become a part of him.

Sary'on had explained that if a person used a soul-forged item long enough, even if they weren't the creator of it, it would bond to them. How it would entangle itself in the person's soul. Not as effectively as the person it had been created for originally. But it still became bonded to them. When he'd explained the sense of loss he'd felt while holding its pieces, she had confirmed that his feelings were not entirely inaccurate.

The concept reminded him of the bond he had with Steve.

It was these thoughts that he focused on as he poured magical energy down through his arms, out of his hands, and into the blade as the blacksmith hammered away at it.

"Adjust!" She yelled again, breaking him out of his thoughts as he rotated the blade again.

Several more hours they worked like that. On into what James felt was becoming night, though he couldn't tell in the crystal and fungus lit darkness of the fortress town. Eventually he had to switch the tongs over to his wolf arm, as his human arm began to cramp and strain with the force necessary to keep the burning hot metal in place.

But he never dropped it, and never let the memories of the Mage's Blade stop flowing through his mind.

Once the blade was shaped and heated to near white hot levels Kai came forward with a a trough of some strange liquid that glowed a faint blue color.

Sary'on looked at him in amazement. "Soul Harvester milk?" She asked in awe.

James simply held the blade impatiently.

"If we're going to reforge something of that quality." Kai said simply as he set the trough down with a twang of his instrument. "We might as well do it correctly."

"Guys." James said with a hint of upset.

"Oh. Of course." Sary'on said as she remembered what was happening. She gestured at the trough.

James rushed forward and dunked the blade in the strange liquid. It let out a hiss that almost sounded like a scream. The liquid was like a thick gel and it slowly filled in the gap that the hot blade had pressed into it.

James cringed as he smelled the awful stench of the liquid as it steamed from the heat.

"Oh!" He exclaimed, not letting go of the tongs. "What the fuck?"

"Right." Kai said as a cloth veil wove itself across his nose and mouth. "I should have warned about the stench."

"Ugh. Ya think?" James said as he struggled to breath through his mouth.

The smell was like burnt hair, old vomit, and the faintly rotten smell of a garbage can on a hot day.

Despite this, Sary'on practically had her head in the liquid as she watched the blade rapidly cool. Once it had cooled adequately she gestured for James to pull it out. He did and she grabbed a towel and a file. She wiped the now blackened goop of of the side of the blade and ran the file down its still dull edge.

It made a long, raspy, note that reverberated despite the blade being held in two separate places.

"Oh, and she slides like a beauty." The blacksmith said with a wicked grin. "Come on!" She said excitedly as she pulled the blade, and James along with it, over to the table where Wry'mis was waiting.

"Now the hard part humie." Said the grey dwarf. James ignored what he assumed was meant as some kind of light insult. "Hope you got all that magical memory energy in it right."

James nodded sternly.

"Then let's get enchanting." The dwarf said with a crazy look in his eyes.

Kai and Sary'on stood back and watched in amazement as magical energy began to flow from the blade into the table that it had been set upon.

And the two casters began to work.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y9aarm/wait_is_this_just_gate_245/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (243/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y6na38/wait_is_this_just_gate_242/)

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"Well, I can reforge what's left of the blade." Sary'on said with a hint of skepticism. "But you're missing some pieces. So it'll either be shorter, or thinner." The tall, golden haired deep elf said as she examined the bits of broken blade. She ran a finger over one of the warped edges where a bullet had bent the edge before shattering it. "How'd you say you did this?"

"I didn't." James replied as he watched the Blacksmith's examination. "I was blocking an attack."

Sary'on ran a thumb along the flat of the blade as she looked at it closely. "This is soul-forged steel." She said. "Or it was." She looked at James curiously. "What did you get hit by that could do this?"

"It's.... a long story." James said. "What's soul-forged steel?"

"It's when a crafter puts their heart and soul into what they create, or in this case smith." She said. "Not literally. But... It's a craft of passion. When this blade was made it was the pride and joy of its creator. Both in terms of its physical creation AND its enchantment."

"And that makes it stronger?" He asked.

"Course it does." She scoffed. "It's a rare thing that ANY kind of craftsman can even make something like it. The epitome of their crafting skill, the epitome of their enchanting skill. A pure representation, through creation, of who they were as a person. No ordinary person can soul forge something. A blacksmith like myself can go their entire life without creating even a single soul-forged item. And I'll live nearly three thousand years before age takes me." She examined the handle of the sword. "And this was made by a human."

"How can you tell?" James asked.

"Because the maker's mark," She pointed at a small symbol that James had seen before just below the hand guard. "is in an old human dialect. I can't tell you what it says. But it's old Raynian. They ruled Petravus before the current King's lineage took over." She scratched her head a bit. "To think that a HUMAN could make something like this."

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One of the pieces jumped just a tiny bit. It lay wobbling from the motion. James thought he heard a faint buzzing from another piece.

"I'll be damned." She said. The hammer faded as she set it back down.

She picked up the piece that had jumped. Her eyes glowed with a dull red as she looked at it.

"How long did you say you were using this as a weapon?" She asked.

"Almost a year now." He answered.

"And you've been in lots of fights with it? Against casters and magical creations?" She continued.

"Yeah."

"Hmm." She looked at the piece curiously. Then she turned to him. "D you know how to enchant things?" She asked.

James gulped. "I had.... started... to get lessons on it before I left on this trip."

Sary'on clamped a hand on his shoulder.

"Want your blade back as close to the way it was as possible?" She asked with a stern eye fixed on his.

"Yes." He said flatly. "That's why I came here."

"Then time to finish learning." She said as she turned him toward the forge and pushed him.

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"General!" The commander of the company yelled in a loud, raspy, voice as Amina marched toward him. The soldiers behind him all jumped to attention as he raised his fist to his chest.

"Commander." She replied firmly. Behind her Vickers stood with the reins of the two griffins in hand as he walked them over to a nearby hitch. "Is this the followup force for the group sent out to the desert?"

"Aye ma'am." The large man said as he lowered the salute. She extended her arm and he took it, clasping it at the elbow as they officially

greeted each other. "May I ask? How do you know that? And why the unexpected visit?"

She looked over his shoulder at the other soldiers. "As you were!" She yelled, they immediately jumped to do whatever they'd been doing before. Though some of them decided that looking busy was better than standing or sitting around as they had been.

Then she turned to him. "What do you know of the lost patrol?" She asked.

"Only that they went out based on some suspicions by the dwarves. Clan Dunebasher." He said. "They missed their return date. And the dwarves stopped their messages with their people here in the valley."

She nodded. The information matching the reports she'd read. This company was supposed to go determine the remaining information by searching the area that the unit had disappeared in. They just didn't know what she and Vickers did.

"That's what we'd read in the reports." She said. "How many do you have? And what's the disposition? Also, what's your name commander?"

He stood up straighter, glad to be acknowledged a bit more formally. "Commander Kamil Dreng Ma'am." He said proudly. Then he fished a small scroll from a pouch on his belt. "As for the force; we have one hundred fifty seven foot soldiers, mainly pikeman and swordsman, seventy eight archers, thirty cavalry lancers, twelve dedicated healers and their attached stretchermen, and twenty three royal mages, including one grand mage and a druid."

She listened to the list with rapt attention. When she was sure he was done, the scroll once again rolled up, she asked one question.

"Does your dispatching garrison have more it can spare? Especially mages."

He looked at her in surprise. "Um.... Yes General." He said uncertainly. "But why? What's up there?" He asked as he glanced in the direction of the mountains concealing the desert.

She looked back at Vickers for a moment. He was busy undoing the bag around Steve's head as a couple of the soldiers gawked at the odd site of a bottomless bag restrained drake.

"An enemy who will consider three hundred and fifty seven soldiers easy work. Though I hope it doesn't come to that." She said with a hint of uncertainty that she hoped the man didn't pick up on.

Dreng gulped as he considered the words. He wondered what kind of enemy or monster could survive in a barren desert AND handle a force that size as easily as the General had implied. Surely something from the depths of the Deep Dark.

"Where's your command tent?" She asked, snapping him out of his thoughts. "We'll draft the orders for more men and I'll sign it personally."

"Aye ma'am." He said as he gestured toward the tent with his arm and began walking.

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"Boss." Five said from where she was marching behind Driscoll and Doc.

They'd been marching for almost four days now. In that time they'd covered nearly three hundred miles of the deep underground labyrinth hiding beneath the desert. They'd even set their suits to cruise control a few times so they could rest. The suits had continued walking for them, using automated warnings to wake them anytime something hazardous came up.

They'd crossed chasms, dipped beneath underground lakes and rivers, killed more than a few monsters that had looked like something out of a child's nightmare. And in one instance they'd come across an off-shooting tunnel that had looked like it was moving.

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But they'd seen zero sign of the massive, sentient, swarm that had ambushed them days before. And even less signs of Choi.

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"What?" He asked anyways.

"Major needs us back." She said. He looked at the little symbol for a message. "Came in an hour ago. You've just been ignoring it because you're pissed." She stepped up next to him and pointed at where doc was scorching a bit of webbing. "Plus, minus Doc's flames, the trail's cold. We lost em."

Driscoll simmered within his helmet. She was right of course. But, like Doc, he was pissed at the spiders. And even more pissed at himself for what had happened to Rodriguez.

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"Driscoll. We've had an unexpected development here at the camp. You haven't radioed in in almost two days. But we can talk about that later.

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"Alright guys." He said as he watched Five and Doc turn around and begin walking toward him. he could see Doc's defeated posture even as his suit tried to keep him straightened up. "The Major needs us for something. Trail's cold. We'll get em back another day. Retrace and retract. Back to camp."

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One of these days we're gonna come back and get even for that. He thought before turning and beginning to walk again.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y8bcb4/wait_is_this_just_gate_244/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (243/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y6n6bx/wait_is_this_just_gate_242/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (242/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y44pia/wait_is_this_just_gate_241/)

Writer's note: A bit of insight on our favorite little bro. And, sadly, confirmation about the state of an important piece of equipment.

Enjoy.

Edit: I'm not gonna pretend to know how anyone on the spectrum feels about their lives. I'm not on it so I have no frame of reference. Joey's speech is actually based very closely on the way someone I know worked through their issues with being on the spectrum. But I in no way wish to cheapen anyone else's experiences.

\~

James held the handle gently as he inspected the once marvelous weapon. It was hard to tell in the multi-colored, low, lighting of the crystalline room, but he felt like its once bluish grey blade had dimmed.

"Kai." He said softly as he gripped what was left of the mage's blade. "Can you cast any offensive magic?"

"I can." Kai replied.

"Would you mind building up an attack against me for a moment?" James requested. "No need to actually attack. Just act like you're going to."

Kai looked at him curiously. He could tell that James wasn't alright. So he didn't question the odd request. He gathered energy into his hand. Small, black and blue flames danced on his finger tips.

James looked at the oddly colored flames with mild curiosity.

It was hard to tell, but he thought he felt just the slightest twitch from the sword, then it seemed to vibrate lightly for a second before stilling again.

The oddness of the feeling within James wasn't lost on him. He knew the blade had been semi-sentient, in the fashion that any enchanted item could be. It wasn't like it had ever SPOKEN to him, or used its animated nature to write him any messages. It had only ever driven him toward magical danger, and even tried to pull him into fights that he had no business being in.

But... it had also saved his life more times than he could count. And it WAS still a present from Amina and the King.

And it was his sword.

Looking down at the piece in his hand. At the two fragments lying on the small piece of cloth on his lap.

It felt like he'd lost another friend. Seeing its ruined state had felt akin to when he'd realized he was missing a hand after the battle with the elemental that had ruined the capital.

As if he'd lost a part of his body.

And that was to say nothing of the handle to his chain, which sat on the table with only a handful of links still attached to it. He'd had that weapon even longer. Since his first REAL battle in this world. The one that had set him on the path toward a future with Amina at his side.

"Is there a blacksmith in this fortress?" He asked after staring at the two fragmented weapons for several seconds more.

Kai nodded. "There are."

"Any of them good with enchantments?"

"I don't know." Kai admitted. "I haven't been to this place in several decades now. But I'd be surprised if there weren't."

James nodded and wrapped the sword back in its cloth bundle. He put both of them back in the repaired bottomless bag. Once they were in he pulled out some new clothes and a handful of armor pieces that he hadn't worn in months and began putting them on. He also drew out his shield and the plain steel sword he'd gotten from Kraug back when he was still new to this world.

"Will you be needing this?" Kai asked as James's assault rifle lowered from the ceiling.

James looked at it, doing what he could to hide his discomfort at the elf still having it.

"No." He said as he grabbed it. "But I will take it back." The weapon held fast, secured by unseen spider webs that even James's strength struggled to break. He let go. "Kai?"

"I need your word that you are no threat to my people." The elf said sternly. "That you're not aligned with these.... 'muck marchers' as you call them."

James's jaw clenched as he stared ahead, not looking at the elf.

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Joey pulled back, swatting her hand away lightly as he did, then began rubbing at his eye.

"That still doesn't explain why mine and James's energy looks different from everyone else's." He said. "Also, all I did was read notes and visualized what the monocle showed me. The rest was just focus."

Veliry sat back, impressed at her student's unexpected progress. *He's learning faster than James did.* She thought. *Hell. He's learning faster than I did. And I'm the third youngest Arch Mage in the history of the kingdom.*

She took a deep breath. She'd actually been curious about the difference herself. And she thought she had an idea as to the reason. But she hadn't been able to confirm from the books James had brought over, and the information available on her tablet was spotty on the subject at

best. But it also seemed like the kind of subject that might require.... delicacy.

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"Well." He said. "I'm what's considered 'high functioning'. I can speak to people. I can learn new things, albeit with difficulty sometimes. I can live a... more or less, normal life."

"I'll say." She said. "You're learning magic at a startling rate."

"That's part of it though." He said, his hand tapping at his leg a bit. A sign she'd learned meant that he'd been just a bit annoyed at something, likely her interruption. "I.... like magic. Just like I like video games and anime... and mechanical engineering. I can.... get obsessed with these subjects very easily and, as you've seen, I can get so caught up in them that I forget basic things. Like.... dinner with my mom and James. Or... eating at all."

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Veliry tilted her head in curiosity.

"She told me to ask James about muscle hypertrophy. Do you know what that is?" He asked.

Veliry thought about it. She thought she might have read something about it in one of the medical books James had given them. But she couldn't remember it. She shook her head.

"Muscle hypertrophy is when muscles, through strain or overuse, get little tears in them. It actually happens all the time. It's part of why, if you work out or go for a long walk or run, your muscles can be sore for the rest of the day, or even days after if you went too hard." He said in a rapid, yet familiar excitement. "Well. That and lactic acid."

"Okay?" She said curiously. "What does this have to do with the way you think?"

"Well." He said with a smile. "James explained it to me. That's only the first half of muscular hypertrophy. The second half is that your muscles heal. They make little miniature scars over the tears they made. That scar tissue BECOMES muscle too. As a result your muscles get bigger and, as long as you keep working out, they get stronger over time. It turns out bones do something similar, but for them its not about size, but density."

She thought about the concept. It made sense in theory. Though, medical knowledge and healing weren't her specialty. She'd have to ask one of the healers about it.

"I still don't understand how that relates to you switching from thinking of your condition as suffering versus struggling." She admitted.

"It's kind of like your theory on Magical Overuse." He said simply.

"You... read my theory?" She asked in surprise. She had honestly forgotten that she had a copy of the thesis in her lab.

"It was attached to one of your unsent memos to the King about how James is becoming so strong so fast." He said, causing her face to flush. Those letters were meant only for the King. One being read by anyone else was an accident and completely her fault. "And it very closely resembles the way muscle growth works." He said, completely unaware of the potential security breach he'd just brushed over.

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"James said they sucked. They sucked a lot at first. Hell, he said he thought he was gonna die after his first full marathon." Joey grinned.

"But he also said that after he'd recovered he felt like he could run laps around the world."

Veliry nodded. She'd seen James AND Vickers go for runs, and according to Amina and Kela, both of them could run for days compared to most Petravians.

"He struggled." Joey said. "Hell, he suffered. He showed me a picture of one of his toes after that first marathon. The nail on his big toe fell off after a few days."

Veliry cringed.

"But." Joey continued. "He pushed through the suffering and became stronger because of it. Maybe only at running, sure. But still. He saw a goal. He struggled and suffered until he could achieve it. And he came out the other side of it alive, and with a new hobby that he enjoyed." He smiled again. "My therapist put it in those terms and suddenly I just... understood what I had to do to become WHO I want to be. Struggled my way through a difficult math class THREE TIMES. Because I knew that on the other side was the ability to become a Mechanical Engineer."

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That made Veliry's thoughts crash to a halt.

"But." She began. "Now you're here."

"Yeah." He said, still smiling.

"And you might never return."

He shrugged. "Yeah."

"So you'll never be a mechanical engineer." She said. "Or at least it's unlikely."

Joey nodded a bit. "And that sucks." He admitted. "Makes me pissed that I DID fight my way through that class a bit. But I've also got my brother back. And," He held his hand up and his clothes began to flutter around him. He let go of a piece of parchment and it flew up until it touched the ceiling, then fluttered off to the side. "I've got freaking magic. That's WAAAAAY cooler than being an engineer. And uses way less math." He looked back at her again. "I may struggle a bit. I did those first few days for sure. I may even suffer a bit. James sure has since he got here." He said with a solemn look. "But on the other side of that is a stronger me. Just like James has become stronger." He nodded his head a bit. "He moves like an anime character. I can't wait to do that."

You two really are different aren't you? She wondered as she watched him follow the piece of paper with his eyes.

"Now seriously." He said. "I know we got sidetracked. Sorry about that. But seriously, why is my energy flow so different from anyone else?"

"Oh, shit." She said. "I completely forgot that was how we started this conversation." She admitted.

"It's okay." Joey reassured her. "Like I said; I ramble."

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"IS THAT IT?" Vickers yelled through the rushing air as he and Amina flew. He pointed at the small gap between two of the mountains.

She looked over at where he'd been pointing and then looked back and nodded.

"THAT'S THE TOWN THAT THE ARMY DETACHMENT WAS DISPATCHED FROM!" She confirmed, her throat and mouth glowing as she used her magic to amplify her speech. "IF THE FOLLOW UP FORCE IS BEING MUSTERED, THAN THAT'S WHERE IT'LL BE!"

Vickers nodded as they banked their griffins around the forested hill they'd been flying past. They'd been flying for three days now, having gone around and below the elevated desert where they knew the Earth Military had set up its outpost.

If there was one upside, one she was very happy about, it was the fact that Steve had regained some of his liveliness over the past few days. He still grumbled occasionally, but he was doing better.

Which meant that James was doing better. Wherever he was.

She lightly kicked her griffin, Ciaphas, to go faster.

Tom matched the speed easily.

She had a country to save, her country, from war.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y7g9sn/wait_is_this_just_gate_243/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (242/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y44nsc/wait_is_this_just_gate_241/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: A bit of insight on our favorite little bro. And, sadly, confirmation about the state of an important piece of equipment.

Enjoy.

Edit: I'm not gonna pretend to know how anyone on the spectrum feels about their lives. I'm not on it so I have no frame of reference. Joey's speech is actually based very closely on the way someone I know worked through their issues with being on the spectrum. But I in no way wish to cheapen anyone else's experiences.

\~

James held the handle gently as he inspected the once marvelous weapon. It was hard to tell in the multi-colored, low, lighting of the crystalline room, but he felt like its once bluish grey blade had dimmed.

"Kai." He said softly as he gripped what was left of the mage's blade. "Can you cast any offensive magic?"

"I can." Kai replied.

"Would you mind building up an attack against me for a moment?" James requested. "No need to actually attack. Just act like you're going to."

Kai looked at him curiously. He could tell that James wasn't alright. So he didn't question the odd request. He gathered energy into his hand. Small, black and blue flames danced on his finger tips.

James looked at the oddly colored flames with mild curiosity.

It was hard to tell, but he thought he felt just the slightest twitch from the sword, then it seemed to vibrate lightly for a second before stilling again.

The oddness of the feeling within James wasn't lost on him. He knew the blade had been semi-sentient, in the fashion that any enchanted item could be. It wasn't like it had ever SPOKEN to him, or used its animated nature to write him any messages. It had only ever driven him toward magical danger, and even tried to pull him into fights that he had no business being in.

But... it had also saved his life more times than he could count. And it WAS still a present from Amina and the King.

And it was his sword.

Looking down at the piece in his hand. At the two fragments lying on the small piece of cloth on his lap.

It felt like he'd lost another friend. Seeing its ruined state had felt akin to when he'd realized he was missing a hand after the battle with the elemental that had ruined the capital.

As if he'd lost a part of his body.

And that was to say nothing of the handle to his chain, which sat on the table with only a handful of links still attached to it. He'd had that weapon even longer. Since his first REAL battle in this world. The one that had set him on the path toward a future with Amina at his side.

"Is there a blacksmith in this fortress?" He asked after staring at the two fragmented weapons for several seconds more.

Kai nodded. "There are."

"Any of them good with enchantments?"

"I don't know." Kai admitted. "I haven't been to this place in several decades now. But I'd be surprised if there weren't."

James nodded and wrapped the sword back in its cloth bundle. He put both of them back in the repaired bottomless bag. Once they were in he pulled out some new clothes and a handful of armor pieces that he hadn't worn in months and began putting them on. He also drew out his shield and the plain steel sword he'd gotten from Kraug back when he was still new to this world.

"Will you be needing this?" Kai asked as James's assault rifle lowered from the ceiling.

James looked at it, doing what he could to hide his discomfort at the elf still having it.

"No." He said as he grabbed it. "But I will take it back." The weapon held fast, secured by unseen spider webs that even James's strength struggled to break. He let go. "Kai?"

"I need your word that you are no threat to my people." The elf said sternly. "That you're not aligned with these.... 'muck marchers' as you call them."

James's jaw clenched as he stared ahead, not looking at the elf.

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"And you might never return."

He shrugged. "Yeah."

"So you'll never be a mechanical engineer." She said. "Or at least it's unlikely."

Joey nodded a bit. "And that sucks." He admitted. "Makes me pissed that I DID fight my way through that class a bit. But I've also got my brother back. And," He held his hand up and his clothes began to flutter around him. He let go of a piece of parchment and it flew up until it touched the ceiling, then fluttered off to the side. "I've got freaking magic. That's WAAAAAY cooler than being an engineer. And uses way less math." He looked back at her again. "I may struggle a bit. I did those first few days for sure. I may even suffer a bit. James sure has since he got here." He said with a solemn look. "But on the other side of that is a

stronger me. Just like James has become stronger." He nodded his head a bit. "He moves like an anime character. I can't wait to do that."

You two really are different aren't you? She wondered as she watched him follow the piece of paper with his eyes.

"Now seriously." He said. "I know we got sidetracked. Sorry about that. But seriously, why is my energy flow so different from anyone else?"

"Oh, shit." She said. "I completely forgot that was how we started this conversation." She admitted.

"It's okay." Joey reassured her. "Like I said; I ramble."

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"IS THAT IT?" Vickers yelled through the rushing air as he and Amina flew. He pointed at the small gap between two of the mountains.

She looked over at where he'd been pointing and then looked back and nodded.

"THAT'S THE TOWN THAT THE ARMY DETACHMENT WAS DISPATCHED FROM!" She confirmed, her throat and mouth glowing as she used her magic to amplify her speech. "IF THE FOLLOW UP FORCE IS BEING MUSTERED, THAN THAT'S WHERE IT'LL BE!"

Vickers nodded as they banked their griffins around the forested hill they'd been flying past. They'd been flying for three days now, having gone around and below the elevated desert where they knew the Earth Military had set up its outpost.

If there was one upside, one she was very happy about, it was the fact that Steve had regained some of his liveliness over the past few days. He still grumbled occasionally, but he was doing better.

Which meant that James was doing better. Wherever he was.

She lightly kicked her griffin, Ciaphas, to go faster.

Tom matched the speed easily.

She had a country to save, her country, from war.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y7g7yg/wait_is_this_just_gate_243/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (241/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y3551i/wait_is_this_just_gate_240/)

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Also: Momma Choi still exists. Yaaaaay.

Enjoy.

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I look like an Asian Frankenstein's monster He thought glumly. *Mom's gonna kill me.* His head drooped. *Amina's gonna kill me.*

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"Uhhhhh." He began.

"Just a Leech cap." She said as if it explained everything. "Pulls out toxins. Leave it be. It'll fall off when it's done."

And with that, she was gone out the small sliding door on the side of the room.

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Before James could respond Kai had ascended to the, startlingly high, ceiling and out of sight. Where he'd gone, James had no idea. He couldn't see anything past the glowing webs that covered most of it, and Kai had gone through an opening that appeared and disappeared faster than made sense.

He looked down at his hand, and the several small bits of fungus that had formed a rather uncomfortable shape in between his knuckles. He flicked the wet looking.... folds.... with his left hand's clawed pointer finger. They made a discomforting squelching noise and James cringed.

"Don't play with them." Kai said in that close-yet-echoing way that the chamber seemed to cause. "Rest."

James didn't think that was gonna happen.

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The Major stood on the top of the dune next to the M.F.F.V. as the talk, bulky, person walked across the desert toward their camp. He was wearing a tan and brown cloak that concealed his form and anything that they might have been holding, and its hood kept their face in shade.

Still, she'd seen the enhanced footage from the aerial encounter two days before. The colors and shape of the clothing he'd been wearing while riding his griffin, which was itself fairly recognizable at least in her mind, coupled with the fact that he'd been analyzing their camp with an easily identified sniper rifle, had made it easy to tell who the approaching man was.

But she knew better than to trust anything, and she also knew that he hadn't been alone then and so he probably wasn't alone now. Appearances be damned.

She wasn't alone either.

Twenty yards away, just below the sand, Chief Carroll sat waiting. She'd had her leg repaired by the technicians that her team had brought along with them, and now she was sitting with her weapon in a plastic bag. She'd synced her suit up to the cameras that the Miffy had all over it, and the Major had direct contact with her over the radio.

"Definitely one of ours." Carroll said as the man approached. "He's got a vest on. And a pistol on his hip."

The Major didn't say anything in response.

The man stopped some ten yards away. He didn't even pretend to be a local as he spoke in plain English, with his natural Boston accent.

"Bit surprised seein' you guys out here." He said without dropping his hood.

"Funny." She replied. "That's my line..... Chief."

"Strange thermal readings on his left side." Carroll chimed in. "Like he's holding an ice pack or something."

The two of them, Chief and Major, stared at each other for several long moments.

In a quick, fluid, motion that made her tense for just a moment, his left hand rose up and pulled back his hood. Underneath was the close cropped hair that she expected, with a bit of fuzz on his face from not having shaved in a week or so.

"Major." He replied coolly. "Care to explain why there's an army base surrounded by Miffy's way out in the desert?" He asked while pointing at the vehicle in question. "I mean, I knew the initial team was coming out here to set up a small post. But... this seems.... excessive."

"It was always the plan sooner or later." She admitted. "But our hand was forced by the locals getting a bit.... aggressive... themselves."

Vickers' nodded as if that made sense to him. "Fair enough." He said after a moment. "You kill that royal guard platoon that came out here?"

"You know about that?" She shot back, answering without actually answering.

"It may not seem like it." He began. "But these guys actually have their lines of communication pretty well nailed down for how simple they are. And their Military actually functions better than you'd think."

"Does it?" She asked. "I'll have to take your word for it. Now what, are you doing here Chief? And where's your friend? Was that Choi?"

Vickers didn't let his emotions show. *So they don't know either.* He thought.

"Actually no." He answered. "That's just a traveling partner. We were on Choi's trail though."

"Oh?"

"Yeah." He said. "We got word of an issue with the blight down near the coast on the other side of the mountain range." He lied. "Choi was asked to take a look at it. He moves a lot faster than we do so he was a couple days ahead. But he missed his check in."

"So that's what those radio signals we detected were?" She asked. "You and him trying to get in touch."

"Yeah." He said again. "Haven't seen him around here have you? Woulda been flying around like a human missile." He made a point of looking at the vehicle next to her. "Wouldn't want him to have uh... alarmed.... anyone."

The major bit her lower lip a bit as she thought. On the one hand this all but confirmed Driscoll's suspicion. But on the other hand she didn't like the idea that she might have killed Choi. It was obvious that Earth Command wanted him alive, even if they were also clearly uncertain of his allegiance nowadays.

"Afraid nobody like that has come around." She said finally. "Also, the M.F.F.V.'s are set to standard combat S.O.P.'s."

"Right." He said with a nod. "Course they are. After all, y'all came under attack. Right?"

"That's right." She said smugly.

A long silence took place as the two people stared each other down. Vickers broke it first.

"Well. I guess I'll get back to my traveling companion." He said as he took a half step back. "We'll uh. Get out of you guys' hair and uh... give you a wide berth."

"You do that Chief." She said. "And come up with a good cover story for the princess for us." She said with a smirk.

Vickers froze for a split second, staring at her again. Then he nodded. "Will do ma'am." He said.

Then he turned around and began walking away, his back turned to the Major, the weapon platform and, unknown to him, the armored Carroll.

"I can take him." Carroll radioed in her ear. "I'll have him pinned before he even has time to turn around."

The Major was about to reply with an order to stand down when something unexpected happened.

In a spray of desert sand Vickers began to run. She flinched back at the sudden burst of speed even as the Miffy right next to her came to life, activated by the Chief's acceleration. It's massive barrels turned to track him.

"Ma'am what the hell is that?" The marine currently at the Miffy's control panel asked. "It's moving nearly seventy miles per hour."

She looked at the vehicle in shock at the announcement.

"How the hell?" A tinny, speaker amplified, voice asked from beside her. She turned back and Carroll was standing next to her. She hadn't even heard the massive armored woman move.

"Let him go." She said into her mic, even as she struggled to understand what she'd just seen.

The spray of sand that marked Vickers' retreat went around a dune, and out of sight.

THAT was his threat. She thought, anger clenching her jaw as she realized that she'd been played. *And he probably wasn't even surprised by ours.*

\-------------------------

"They saw him." Vickers said a little over an hour later as he got to the small camp site that the princess had set up for them on the side same mountain from before. "I don't know what happened. But he came through here. And they interacted."

"He must be alive." She said as she brushed Steve's fur. "Steve wouldn't be if he'd died."

She'd let the massive drake out the night before when he'd been writhing and groaning in some kind of discomfort. If it was pain then it was of a limited kind, unlike when he'd bellowed and roared during their flight several days before, forcing them to land for a moment before he'd entered a stupor. He was more relaxed now, but still occasionally grumbled and shifted from some unseen aches that she knew had to be from James.

"I don't think they have him." Vickers said as he gave Tom a few reassuring pats on the head. "Least that wasn't the vibe I got. Course, she was a cold bitch. So who knows."

"She?" Amina asked.

"Yeah. A Major." He replied. "And I was right. Those were Miffy's. Plus there was someone else there. Someone hiding in the sand."

"How do you know?" She asked.

"You know how you can sense the magic around you if you try?" He asked in return. She nodded and he continued. "Felt like there was.... I don't know... a void... nearby. One that was about my size and sitting just a few inches below the sand."

"Your senses are that fine tuned?" She wondered, though it didn't surprise her. James's magic had progressed with startling speed. Vickers had managed to develop ice magic without anyone else even knowing.

"Part of the job." He said. "Stealth specialist, remember? Being aware of my surroundings is an important trait. Once I got the juice I focused a lot of my energy on sensing stuff around me. Made my head hurt like a bitch for the first few weeks. But. Meh." He shrugged. "Still got a ways to go."

"They didn't kill him." She whispered, more to herself than anyone else. Steve's massive yellowish green eye turned lazily to look at her. She stroked the fur behind his jaw. "And they don't have him boy." She said as the massive lizard's secondary eyelid shut in contentment. "We'll get him back to you."

And to me. She thought.

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Mrs. Choi stepped through the doors uncertainly. She still didn't understand the language of this world when it came to writing. But the King had given her pretty clear directions on where to go. And with James on a trip and Joey practically living in his teacher's lab nowadays, she needed something to do.

The view on the other side of the door instantly made her feel more at ease. The building was still the same stone and wood that she'd become accustomed to over the past months. But the furniture and the dress of the staff was as reassuringly familiar as a favorite jacket to her.

This... was a where a nurse, which she was, was supposed to be.

"Good morning." Said a young elf man behind the desk. "How can I help you today? This isn't an emergency is it?"

"No." She said with a smile. "I'm Margaret Choi." She added as she walked over to the desk. "The King said that I might be able to help here."

"Oh. But of course Mrs. Choi. He sent word ahead. Let me go grab the lead healer on duty today." He said as he quickly stood up, gave a small bow, and then walked around his side of the desk and through the nearby opening into the back.

While she waited she looked around at the waiting room once more. Barring the fact that all the chairs were old fashioned, and likely hand made, and also the fact that there was no T.V. or radio playing old soap

operas or cheesy court shows, it was very clearly a hospital waiting room.

"Greetings Mrs. Choi." Said a booming voice behind her.

She turned around and then took a half step backwards in surprise as she craned her neck upward to look at the source of the voice.

There was no way to describe the.... man... standing just inside of the doorway.

"Minotaur?" She asked under her breath.

"You're familiar with my people?" He asked. "I'd heard reports that the young Captain was familiar with some of the races of this world. I'm glad to know that they were true."

He bowed and then held out a hand. She took it tentatively, awed at how much larger the three fingered hand was than her own.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y6na38/wait_is_this_just_gate_242/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (241/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y352px/wait_is_this_just_gate_240/) /
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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y6n6bx/wait_is_this_just_gate_242/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (240/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y2jq4o/wait_is_this_just_gate_239/)

Writer's note: James's explosive style is very obviously modeled after Bakugo from MHA.

Joey's personality is based on being a cross between Lemillion and Amajiki. ***I HAVE SPOKEN!!!***

Enjoy.

\~

"So they're men?" Kai asked uncertainly. "That is.... armor?"

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"I'm a gun wielding combat mage from another dimension, whose marrying a gorgeous fantasy princess, and is supposedly fated to save this world. And your a midnight black elf... prince thing.... that controls spiders. And we're currently discussing the death of a clan of sand mage dwarves at the hands of things you thought were golems that are actually super advanced robo-warriors that are ALSO from another dimension.... My dimension precisely." James said. Then he made an exaggerated sweep of his head to gesture at the room. "While we're sitting inside a giant amethyst castle tower in an underground fortress that is also made of amethyst." He tilted his head a bit. "Far fetched seems to be the name of the game."

"It's actually a combination of amethyst and topaz." Kai replied.

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Kai looked him in the eyes as he pleaded his case.

"Will they be able to find you?" Kai asked, not releasing James as he floated closer.

James wondered that himself.

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Again, Kai looked him in the eyes as he said this. Then his eyes glanced down at the spiders still resting on James's throat.

He played a soft strum on his instrument. Before James knew it he was sitting on the side of a soft bed, his limbs and body released from

their unseen restraints. He felt himself over with his hands, ignoring the dull throbbing that ached through his whole body as he did. There was no sign that the spiders had ever been there.

Then he realized that his clothes were different. Made of a material that felt like nothing he'd ever felt before, and as he looked down he saw that they were different hues of green and brown that somewhat mimicked the gear he'd been wearing while flying.

"Did you.... change my clothes?" He asked.

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They were fine. So small that he might not have noticed them if he'd had more body hair than he did. But his body was a patchwork of fine, spider silk, stitches.

He sagged with the realization.

"How bad was I?" He asked.

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Pneumatic punch. Joey reminded himself as he focused on the energy flowing through his hands. *James calls it a pneumatic punch. You understand pneumatics. Small area, high pressure, quick burst. Dummy's twenty feet away. Rusty metal armor.*

Veliry, eyes glowing, watched him from the side of the training yard. "Good control." She said under her breath as her student stood, clothes flapping in the unseen wind, only a few yards away.

Joey took a step forward, eyes still closed, as his arm swept around him in a circle. He didn't know why, but emulating the old Air Bender show his father had shown him and his brother, felt natural to do.

As he brought his hand forward and swung it at the dummy, he opened his eyes and released the energy.

"Hah!" He exclaimed as he did.

The center of the dummy's chest exploded away from him in a blast of straw, wood splinters, and metal fragmentation.

Then, a moment later, a foot wide hole punched through the wooden back wall some ten feet behind it.

Then there was a yell as a cloud of dust and debris appeared at the base of the castle wall some twenty feet behind that, causing a passing soldier to jump out of the way. Several of the guards on top rushed to peer over the side of the wall in confusion.

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Joey lowered his hand as he slowly bent down to look through the hole in the wooden barrier. One of the planks it was made of clattered to the ground as he did and he winced. Behind it there was a massive indentation in the stone of the castle wall, and a pile of loose rubble beneath it and scattered outward a bit.

He looked up at the guards, who all had confused or angry looks on their face. Without realizing it, his hands went up to cover his ears.

"Sorry." He said weakly as he turned to walk over to Veliry.

Veliry had the opposite kind of reaction.

"Joey?" She asked as he neared her. "That was... INCREDIBLE!"

Joey quickly turned away and froze as his teacher began eagerly jumping up and down in excitement. She quickly flew over to the stone wall and began inspecting the damage to it, completely oblivious of the glares from the royal soldiers.

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"And you didn't even need a life or death situation to make it happen!" Veliry exclaimed excitedly from somewhere behind him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (240/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y2jojr/wait_is_this_just_gate_239/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James's explosive style is very obviously modeled after Bakugo from MHA.

Joey's personality is based on being a cross between Lemillion and Amajiki. ***I HAVE SPOKEN!!!***

Enjoy.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y1hwt7/wait_is_this_just_gate_238/)

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"Sooooo." James began. "When you say that golems killed the dwarves. What do you mean?"

"Precisely what I said." Kai said with a slight scowl on his face. James felt his head pulled back by the unseen strands holding it in place. He also began rotating in the air, and felt things moving around his feet.

"Am I being..... cocooned?" He asked with a hint of fear.

"Worry about that later." Kai said sternly. "WHO... is following you?"

"My fiance and my.... subordinate... technically." James answered as he felt his head being angled further back, exposing his neck uncomfortably.

"Not golems?"

"Not unless the Agency is making attempt number five hundred to kill me." James replied. His feet felt like they'd been saran wrapped as he tried to struggle for movement. "And they SHOULDN'T have any weapons like my rifle. Not unless they really are dimension hopping."

"And why would the Agency bother with killing a human like you?" Kai asked.

"Because I've pissed them off. Because my fiance is a princess. Because I killed the Grinner and fucked up their plans. Hell, maybe just because I'm the summoned hero. Or maybe MY government has gone full villain mode and made some kind of deal with them." James said frantically as he felt the spiders finish wrapping his calves and move up to his knees.

He was surprised at the last statement. He'd never thought of it before. But now that he'd said it, it did sound like something he needed to worry about.

Suddenly, as Kai played a discordant note, James stopped spinning. He felt the spiders stop their progress on his legs.

"Did you just say that you're the summoned hero?" Kai asked, his formerly aggressive tone set aside in favor of curiosity.

"Uh.... yeah." James said. "You've been through my bag apparently. My medallion is in there."

He heard Kai rustling through his belongings. He didn't like the idea of someone going through his stuff. But he also wasn't in a position to complain.

A chord played and James found himself mostly upright as Kai held up the jade green piece of royal jewelry in question.

"Okay." The elf said as he looked past it at James. "That confirms at least that part. It still doesn't explain why those golems had weapons like yours."

As if by magic, and James realized it probably was, the rifle lowered from the ceiling back into Kai's hands.

The elf grabbed it by its pistol grip and pointed the barrel at him.

James's worry dissolved as he became angry.

"DON'T....FUCKING....AIM. THAT. AT. ME." He said, enunciating each word harshly as he did.

Kai flinched back slightly at the sudden change in his prisoner's tone. Hesitantly, he released the weapon and it floated sideways and pressed to the wall.

"So you do know how it operates." He said.

James attempted to cock his head to the side, but his restraints prevented it.

"How do YOU... know how it operates?" He asked back.

"I witnessed it myself. Not firsthand, technically. But close enough." Kai answered.

James's eyebrows furrowed at the statement. "You saw them being used." He asked. "What? Like.... you fought these.... golems?"

Kai held a hand up and a black and brown furred spider the size of a cat lowered gently onto it.

"Not.... directly." Kai admitted. "But I was there."

James gulped at the sight of the massive arachnid.

"Okay." He said. "I know what the golems I'm thinking of look like. But can you show me what these ones looked like?" He asked. "Can.... can these things.... do visual stuff?"

Kai raised an eyebrow and seemed to almost scoff.

"Of course they can." He said. "I'm called the Weaver for a reason."

"I thought you were the Prince of Eyes or whatever those other two called you." James said curiously. "I wasn't hallucinating that, was I?"

Kai's eyebrow raised up even higher. "You remember that?" He asked. "You are remarkably resistant to venom." He said softly. "Must be the arm."

James didn't notice the comment as he watched a set of small, fast moving, spiders begin weaving a formation of multicolored web threads in front of him into an almost holographic display. The motions of the small arachnids was mesmerizing, like watching a 3d printer time-lapse video.

Then he began to realize what they were showing him.

"Oh fuck." He said as the image gained clarity.

"What is it?" Kai asked. "Are those your friends?"

"No." James replied grimly. "But if they're in this world now. Then we've got bigger problems than I realized." He struggled to turn his head to look past the three dimensional image at Kai. After a moment he sighed. "Can you let my head move?" Kai played a note and James felt a release. He turned and looked at the elf. "Tell me you put some serious distance between us and them." He said with a look of concern. "Also; they're not golems."

Kai's head tilted a bit just as there came a faint ringing resonance from nearby.

"Sporesman here." Said a woman's voice that sounded loud enough to be nearby, but also echoed like they were in a cave. "As summoned."

"Just curious." James added as he looked around a bit more. "What the fuck is this room made of?"

\-------------------------

"Okay." Vickers said as he and Amina hovered on their griffins, Vickers looking down at the valley nearly two miles beneath them. "Think I know what happened to Choi."

"What?" Amina asked eagerly. "Do you see him?"

"Nah." Vickers said. "But... I got eyes on the base. And I think I see what might've caused him to not check in, although I hope I'm wrong." He pointed at a series of small rectangular shapes that formed a large ring around the camp.

She lifted her looking glass to her eye as Vickers placed his rifle back on his shoulder and retrieved an odd looking looking glass of his own from one of his bags.

"This'll make their sensors freak out." He said under his breath.

She looked through her glass, down at the camp below. There were several tents that looked just like any travelers tents you might see in the country. But scattered randomly between them were much more difficult to spot shapes of some kind. They blended in with the sand beneath them almost too well and had hard to define edges.

"Those camouflaged tents are ours." Vickers said as he saw her focusing. "They have these nets that are coated in a weak adhesive. They rub em all over the sand so it sticks to em. Then they place em OVER the tents. Makes em hard to spot. Helps with heat dissipation. But it works in almost any environment."

Amina considered the idea. Veliry would love to hear about it. It was simple, quick, and much more effective than expected.

But she had to set those thoughts aside. She was a General, yes. But right now her love was missing.

"See that ring they made around the camp? Looks like a couple miles out on all sides." Vickers asked as he panned the device around.

She adjusted her glass and looked at them curiously.

"Those look similar to the vehicle James arrived to this world in." She said after a moment.

"Yeah." Vickers agreed. "Same chassis. Just ten feet longer and with deploy-able support braces. See those two massive sets of tubes on top? The ones that are pointed right at us?"

"Is that what those are?" She asked.

"Yeah." He said grimly.

He looked at the readout on his device and then pointed it straight down. He pulled out his tablet and pulled up a program that Amina recognized. James had called it a calculator, though she didn't understand how it worked. After a moment he turned back, thinking hard.

"Wanna say their maximum range is like... three and a half miles.... maybe four." He said. "We're sitting at just over that." He turned to her. "We can't go any closer." He said. "Not on our birds anyways."

"Why not?" She asked.

"Those are M.F.F.V.'s." He said as if that was an answer. "Don't worry about what those letters mean. You can call em Miffy's if you want."

"Okay?" She said curiously. "What's a Miffy?"

Vickers sighed and his face turned downcast.

"It's an aerial interception system." He said. "Those tubes that they're pointing at us are actually massive rotary cannons." He used his hand to jiggle his rifle a bit. "Like one of these, only about a hundred times bigger, and capable of shooting a few thousand rounds a minute. Bullets are the size of.... I don't know, that dagger on your hip maybe."

She looked down at the dagger in question. She knew what all the words he'd said meant. But what did they have to do with James?

"They shoot down planes. Missiles. Incoming artillery." Vickers continued, his face darkening with each word. "And probably guys that fly like missiles too."

Then she understood his meaning.

"No." She said in a hiss.

She was about to dive when Vickers' hand grabbed her shoulder.

"No." He echoed, only much more sternly. He pointed down at the vehicles in question. "They already see us." He said as she glared at him. "They know we're here. They also know that I just ranged em. Those things can detect range finders like this one." He said while holding up the device he'd been using. "Only reason they aint knocked us out of the sky is because we're just outside of their effective range. We go closer? They turn us into freakin' Swiss cheese."

"And if James went closer?" She asked, almost yelling.

"That's what we gotta find out." He said. "You got a bow and arrow right?" He asked.

Her eyebrows furrowed. "Of course. Why?"

"Grab it." He said. "I got an idea." He began rummaging through his bags.

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The Major watched from over Johannson's shoulder as the two mounted flyers held some kind of conversation.

"You're sure it was a ranging laser?" She asked.

"If it wasn't than the locals have got something close enough for the Miffy's to call it one." He replied as he kept an eye on HIS range readout.

"And they're out of range?" She asked.

"By about a hundred meters ma'am."

"Can you work that?" She asked with a cocked eyebrow.

He thought for a moment. It wouldn't be the hardest shot he'd ever made. "Could." He admitted. "But they're clearly aware of-SHIT!" He interrupted himself as the control panel read an incoming projectile. Then he saw the speed and his head angled a bit in confusion. It was never going to hit anything.

"What?" She asked.

He looked at one of the tracking sensors. The main camera remained fixated on the two riders now that he had control of his reflexes again.

"Looks like... an arrow?" He said in confusion. "Oh hey. It has a white piece of cloth attached to it." He turned back to look at her for a moment. "They.... surrender?"

On the main screen the two riders had turned and were flying away.

"Aaaaand they're leaving?" He turned back to the Major, whose expression bore no sign of confusion.

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"Am I being..... cocooned?" He asked with a hint of fear.

"Worry about that later." Kai said sternly. "WHO... is following you?"

"My fiance and my.... subordinate... technically." James answered as he felt his head being angled further back, exposing his neck uncomfortably.

"Not golems?"

"Not unless the Agency is making attempt number five hundred to kill me." James replied. His feet felt like they'd been saran wrapped as he tried to struggle for movement. "And they SHOULDN'T have any weapons like my rifle. Not unless they really are dimension hopping."

"And why would the Agency bother with killing a human like you?" Kai asked.

"Because I've pissed them off. Because my fiance is a princess. Because I killed the Grinner and fucked up their plans. Hell, maybe just because I'm the summoned hero. Or maybe MY government has gone full villain mode and made some kind of deal with them." James said frantically as he felt the spiders finish wrapping his calves and move up to his knees.

He was surprised at the last statement. He'd never thought of it before. But now that he'd said it, it did sound like something he needed to worry about.

Suddenly, as Kai played a discordant note, James stopped spinning. He felt the spiders stop their progress on his legs.

"Did you just say that you're the summoned hero?" Kai asked, his formerly aggressive tone set aside in favor of curiosity.

"Uh.... yeah." James said. "You've been through my bag apparently. My medallion is in there."

He heard Kai rustling through his belongings. He didn't like the idea of someone going through his stuff. But he also wasn't in a position to complain.

A chord played and James found himself mostly upright as Kai held up the jade green piece of royal jewelry in question.

"Okay." The elf said as he looked past it at James. "That confirms at least that part. It still doesn't explain why those golems had weapons like yours."

As if by magic, and James realized it probably was, the rifle lowered from the ceiling back into Kai's hands.

The elf grabbed it by its pistol grip and pointed the barrel at him.

James's worry dissolved as he became angry.

"DON'T....FUCKING....AIM. THAT. AT. ME." He said, enunciating each word harshly as he did.

Kai flinched back slightly at the sudden change in his prisoner's tone. Hesitantly, he released the weapon and it floated sideways and pressed to the wall.

"So you do know how it operates." He said.

James attempted to cock his head to the side, but his restraints prevented it.

"How do YOU... know how it operates?" He asked back.

"I witnessed it myself. Not firsthand, technically. But close enough." Kai answered.

James's eyebrows furrowed at the statement. "You saw them being used." He asked. "What? Like.... you fought these.... golems?"

Kai held a hand up and a black and brown furred spider the size of a cat lowered gently onto it.

"Not.... directly." Kai admitted. "But I was there."

James gulped at the sight of the massive arachnid.

"Okay." He said. "I know what the golems I'm thinking of look like. But can you show me what these ones looked like?" He asked. "Can.... can these things.... do visual stuff?"

Kai raised an eyebrow and seemed to almost scoff.

"Of course they can." He said. "I'm called the Weaver for a reason."

"I thought you were the Prince of Eyes or whatever those other two called you." James said curiously. "I wasn't hallucinating that, was I?"

Kai's eyebrow raised up even higher. "You remember that?" He asked. "You are remarkably resistant to venom." He said softly. "Must be the arm."

James didn't notice the comment as he watched a set of small, fast moving, spiders begin weaving a formation of multicolored web threads in front of him into an almost holographic display. The motions of the small arachnids was mesmerizing, like watching a 3d printer time-lapse video.

Then he began to realize what they were showing him.

"Oh fuck." He said as the image gained clarity.

"What is it?" Kai asked. "Are those your friends?"

"No." James replied grimly. "But if they're in this world now. Then we've got bigger problems than I realized." He struggled to turn his head to look past the three dimensional image at Kai. After a moment he sighed. "Can you let my head move?" Kai played a note and James felt a release. He turned and looked at the elf. "Tell me you put some serious distance between us and them." He said with a look of concern. "Also; they're not golems."

Kai's head tilted a bit just as there came a faint ringing resonance from nearby.

"Sporesman here." Said a woman's voice that sounded loud enough to be nearby, but also echoed like they were in a cave. "As summoned."

"Just curious." James added as he looked around a bit more. "What the fuck is this room made of?"

\------------------------

"Okay." Vickers said as he and Amina hovered on their griffins, Vickers looking down at the valley nearly two miles beneath them. "Think I know what happened to Choi."

"What?" Amina asked eagerly. "Do you see him?"

"Nah." Vickers said. "But... I got eyes on the base. And I think I see what might've caused him to not check in, although I hope I'm wrong." He pointed at a series of small rectangular shapes that formed a large ring around the camp.

She lifted her looking glass to her eye as Vickers placed his rifle back on his shoulder and retrieved an odd looking looking glass of his own from one of his bags.

"This'll make their sensors freak out." He said under his breath.

She looked through her glass, down at the camp below. There were several tents that looked just like any travelers tents you might see in the country. But scattered randomly between them were much more difficult to spot shapes of some kind. They blended in with the sand beneath them almost too well and had hard to define edges.

"Those camouflaged tents are ours." Vickers said as he saw her focusing. "They have these nets that are coated in a weak adhesive. They rub em all over the sand so it sticks to em. Then they place em OVER the tents. Makes em hard to spot. Helps with heat dissipation. But it works in almost any environment."

Amina considered the idea. Veliry would love to hear about it. It was simple, quick, and much more effective than expected.

But she had to set those thoughts aside. She was a General, yes. But right now her love was missing.

"See that ring they made around the camp? Looks like a couple miles out on all sides." Vickers asked as he panned the device around.

She adjusted her glass and looked at them curiously.

"Those look similar to the vehicle James arrived to this world in." She said after a moment.

"Yeah." Vickers agreed. "Same chassis. Just ten feet longer and with deploy-able support braces. See those two massive sets of tubes on top? The ones that are pointed right at us?"

"Is that what those are?" She asked.

"Yeah." He said grimly.

He looked at the readout on his device and then pointed it straight down. He pulled out his tablet and pulled up a program that Amina recognized. James had called it a calculator, though she didn't understand how it worked. After a moment he turned back, thinking hard.

"Wanna say their maximum range is like... three and a half miles.... maybe four." He said. "We're sitting at just over that." He turned to her. "We can't go any closer." He said. "Not on our birds anyways."

"Why not?" She asked.

"Those are M.F.F.V.'s." He said as if that was an answer. "Don't worry about what those letters mean. You can call em Miffy's if you want."

"Okay?" She said curiously. "What's a Miffy?"

Vickers sighed and his face turned downcast.

"It's an aerial interception system." He said. "Those tubes that they're pointing at us are actually massive rotary cannons." He used his hand to jiggle his rifle a bit. "Like one of these, only about a hundred times bigger, and capable of shooting a few thousand rounds a minute. Bullets are the size of.... I don't know, that dagger on your hip maybe."

She looked down at the dagger in question. She knew what all the words he'd said meant. But what did they have to do with James?

"They shoot down planes. Missiles. Incoming artillery." Vickers continued, his face darkening with each word. "And probably guys that fly like missiles too."

Then she understood his meaning.

"No." She said in a hiss.

She was about to dive when Vickers' hand grabbed her shoulder.

"No." He echoed, only much more sternly. He pointed down at the vehicles in question. "They already see us." He said as she glared at him. "They know we're here. They also know that I just ranged em. Those things can detect range finders like this one." He said while holding up the device he'd been using. "Only reason they aint knocked us out of the sky is because we're just outside of their effective range. We go closer? They turn us into freakin' Swiss cheese."

"And if James went closer?" She asked, almost yelling.

"That's what we gotta find out." He said. "You got a bow and arrow right?" He asked.

Her eyebrows furrowed. "Of course. Why?"

"Grab it." He said. "I got an idea." He began rummaging through his bags.

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The Major watched from over Johannson's shoulder as the two mounted flyers held some kind of conversation.

"You're sure it was a ranging laser?" She asked.

"If it wasn't than the locals have got something close enough for the Miffy's to call it one." He replied as he kept an eye on HIS range readout.

"And they're out of range?" She asked.

"By about a hundred meters ma'am."

"Can you work that?" She asked with a cocked eyebrow.

He thought for a moment. It wouldn't be the hardest shot he'd ever made. "Could." He admitted. "But they're clearly aware of-SHIT!" He interrupted himself as the control panel read an incoming projectile. Then he saw the speed and his head angled a bit in confusion. It was never going to hit anything.

"What?" She asked.

He looked at one of the tracking sensors. The main camera remained fixated on the two riders now that he had control of his reflexes again.

"Looks like... an arrow?" He said in confusion. "Oh hey. It has a white piece of cloth attached to it." He turned back to look at her for a moment. "They.... surrender?"

On the main screen the two riders had turned and were flying away.

"Aaaaand they're leaving?" He turned back to the Major, whose expression bore no sign of confusion.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y352px/wait_is_this_just_gate_240/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (238/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xyct5l/wait_is_this_just_gate_237/)

Writer's note: Hope yall enjoyed the long weekend (those who had one). I know I did. Downside is that my place also got the years first snow. So.... yaaaaaaaay.

Enjoy.

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James fought his way to consciousness in the pitch black of the Deep Dark. His mind felt like mush as he swam in and out of coherency. The fact that he couldn't see anything, and seemed to be floating, didn't help him latch onto anything that might be an anchor point to latch onto as he felt himself pulling out of the venom induced haze.

"Greetings Prince of Eyes." An unfamiliar woman's voice said. James struggled to focus on it. "I take it that the Prince of Webs was informed of your approach?"

"Of course. And he understands that it is under duress and with a ward under my care." Kai replied.

Prince? James wondered, though the thought felt like wet sand flowing between his fingers.

"We have heard a great commotion. Was that you?" Another voice asked, though they were heavily accented.

"Parts of it." Kai responded. "Though, most of it was caused by a clan of dwarves and their attackers. The ones that I am currently hoping to evade."

"And your ward?" The first voice asked.

"A human. Badly injured. The dwarves asked me to mend him to the best of my abilities." Kai said simply.

"Why?" The second voice asked.

"Because the ones that killed them also attacked him." Kai said.

"You have always been the most generous of the Princes." The second voice said. "The others would have let him die."

"And would have saved themselves only moments of their millennia of life." Kai said. "He wasn't far off from it when I received him."

"Come." Said the first voice. "As is custom, you have the Count's Quarters. We'll fetch the Sporesman."

"Thank you." Kai replied. "He is stable enough for now. They can take their time. I have some questions for my ward. And he's waking up, so now is a perfect time."

"Noooo..." James mumbled through numb lips. "Noooo more... spider bites." He said weakly.

James got the sense that the two other voice's owners were staring at him in surprise, though he couldn't see them. Then Kai spoke again.

"See?" He asked.

"Did you use a dream weaver to put him under?" Asked the first voice. "Looks like a weaver's bite."

"I did." Kai admitted.

"How in the hells is he waking up?" The first voice asked curiously. "And why's his arm like that?"

"He is.... different." Kai said uncertainly. "Hence... the questions."

"Understood." Said the second voice. "You know where you're going." They said, less like a question and more like a statement.

"Of course." Kai replied.

"Then at your leisure sir." The second voice affirmed.

"Thank you." Kai said warmly. Then James felt himself move. "Come James. I know you have questions. We'll get to them soon enough."

James slurred something in response, though even he wasn't sure what. Then things got hazy and hard to focus on again, though not as deeply.

\----------

"No spiders in site." Five said as she swept the hallway they'd just come up from.

Driscoll didn't respond.

"Fuck'd you use thermite for you sonofabitch?" Doc muttered under his breath as he continued treating Rodriguez. "Fuckin' spiders made us eat it. Should've known."

Driscoll ignored this. Doc always got uppity when he was dealing with an injury.

The fact that he was right only made it worse.

"Johnson." He said instead, as he switched Doc's volume down to minimum. "You and Carroll at the entrance?"

"Carroll is." Johnson answered. "I'm already on my way back."

"Acknowledged." Driscoll said, hearing the barely audible vitriol spewing from doc's set as a sort of white noise. "Carroll. You good?"

"Yeah boss." She replied. "Toolies are already on the way. Had two of em bring burners."

"Good girl." He said, not hiding the pleasure in his voice. "I was just about to tell you to relay that."

"I saw the fight." She said, instead of accepting the praise like she normally would. "Rod's fucked up, aint he?"

Driscoll took a deep breath, or as deep a breath as his physiology would allow nowadays, as he looked down at where doc was gingerly removing the molten remains of Rodriguez's face plate.

"Yeah." He said simply. He kneeled down next to the badly disfigured Rodriguez and took the mask from Doc's hand. Doc flinched as he quickly turned to look at him. Then accepted the help as he began pulling tools from his arm panel and placing them on his fingers.

Driscoll pressed the mask to the heavily burned flesh of Rodriguez's face, letting the oxygen rich, slightly anesthetized, air flow through it as Doc began to work on the flesh around the small rubber mask. Rodriguez flinched. Or rather, his face flinched in an almost grimace like expression as the small mask pressed in place. Then he began to relax as he took deep lungfuls of the air it provided.

Doc pressed a small rubbery pad over Rodriguez's ruined left eye, then injected a dark blue fluid into the space beneath. Once he was satisfied that the job was complete, he did the same to the right eye. Then he began spraying a combination sealant/antibiotic foam, that was usually reserved for gun shot wounds and amputations, onto the area around the eye patches and mask. Driscoll lifted the mask just long enough for him to spray some onto the edges of it. Then he placed the mask back on as the sealant hardened into a semi-rigid foam. It would hold the mask on until the Toolies could get him.

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"He'll live." Doc said simply. Driscoll hadn't even noticed how silent the channel was until he heard the statement. "They'll have to give him optic interface plugs. But he'll live."

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Doc didn't say anything else. He simply walked over to where Johnson had arrived and took two of the burner rigs. They were designed to let the squad cut through anchor chains, submarine hulls, underwater facility hulls and more while underwater. But when used on dry land they could be adjusted into high heat, low range, flamethrowers very easily. Doc quickly placed them on his arms, running their control cables into the ports at his wrist, and turned so Johnson could secure the fuel cylinders to his back and legs. Once that was done he quickly stomped past Driscoll.

Driscoll watched him go silently.

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Amina and Vickers stood on the same peak that James had only a few days prior. Vickers looked out at the vast expanse of desert below through his rifle's scope.

"I don't like this." He said after a few minutes.

"Why?" She asked with a hint of worry.

"I don't know. I just don't." He replied. "It's just... too quiet for me."

"I thought you liked quiet?" She asked.

"I do." He agreed. "But this..." He shrugged. "I don't know. Like I said. It's TOO quiet."

They stood that way for several minutes as they continued to look around.

"He'd have found this." She said, finally braking the silence. "There's no way he missed it."

Vickers just nodded as he continued looking around. Something ate at him. Something at the edge of his mind, but he couldn't figure out what.

He tried to sus it out for another minute or so when Tom squeaked with a yawn. He looked at his faithful griffin for a moment as Tom stretched and sat down.

Then he looked back out at the desert.

At the sky.

"Hey." He said. "This place got birds? Or is it supposed to?" He asked. He lifted his rifle again and began panning around once more, but higher this time.

"A few species of predatory birds. Plus some carrion scavengers. Yes." She answered. "Why?"

Vickers looked around a moment longer. "Any of em impressively large?"

She thought for a moment. "Better question for Marcos really." She admitted. "I think one of the scavengers is large." She held her arms out as if to demonstrate.

He looked and nodded. "Well." He said. "We're pretty far away. But I don't see any."

"Really?" She asked. "None at all?"

"Couldn't even see a single bird. Big. Small. Nothing." He confirmed.

"Strange." She said as she placed her hand on her chin. "But we are far away like you said. Let's get closer."

He stood up, slinging his rifle as he did. "Yeah." He agreed. "But lets go slow." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the two griffins. "How high can these things fly?"

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"James?" Kai asked as he lightly tapped at James's cheek. "Are you awake?"

James slowly opened his eyes and was startled to see an actual lit room around him. It wasn't lit in the traditional sense that he was used to. No candles or lamps, no torches. There was a fireplace, but its flames were small and relatively weak. They also produced no smoke that he could see, and he couldn't smell them. There were glowing webs all over the ceiling. Kai's doing, he had no doubt.

The room itself was also not normal. For starters it was round. But it also seemed to be made of some kind of opaque, purplish-blue, glass. Or at least that was what the odd web-based lighting made it look like. There were windows, though they were small, and seemed to have a layer of mesh as a barrier between the inside and outside.

"Kai?" He asked. "Where am I?" His head hurt.

"You are in the Koridian fortress town of my people." Kai replied. "Much deeper than you were when I first met you. But you're safe. And your body is almost finished healing."

"Deeper?" He said. Something about that made his head hurt with memory. Without knowing why he added. "Can't go deeper."

Kai looked at him curiously. "Oh. Why's that?" He asked.

James struggled to know why himself. His head pounded, and he felt something move along his forehead, rustling his hair somewhat. He heard a quick chord played by Kai's instrument. Suddenly his forehead felt as though it had an ice-pack pressed to it. It felt divine.

Then he remembered. His hand reached out, though he wasn't sure why.

"Have to warn them." He said, his lips dry and his throat feeling raw. "The desert. They can't fly into it."

Kai nodded, then grabbed something out of James's sight. A moment later he was pressing a small cup of water to James's lips and letting him sip it. It was cool and refreshing, even if it tasted heavily mineralized and earthy.

"You have friends coming for you?" Kai asked.

James nodded as he eagerly drank at the water.

"Do your friends wear armor?" Kai asked. "Carry weapons similar to your own?"

James nodded. "Yes." He said as he licked his lips.

Suddenly something made the ceiling in front of him darken somewhat. James opened his eyes further and, after a moment of regaining his focus, saw his rifle.

"Is this your weapon James." Kai asked, a hint of menace in his voice now.

James looked at him curiously and was surprised to see the formerly serene, angular, elf face hardened and grim.

"It's.... one of them." James answered. "But... how did you get that? It was in my bottomless bag."

Kai held his hand up and a familiar bag swung into it. But unlike the last time James had seen it, now it had a series of fine, and he was sure spider-wrought, stitches holding it together in several places.

"The bottomless bag that the dwarves had to stabilize, and that I had to help them repair lest it eject its contents all over my webs and potentially cause problems?" Kai asked with a tilted head. "Because it was nearly as damaged as you were?"

"Yeah." James admitted. "That's probably accurate."

Kai took the rifle in his hands awkwardly, James wanted to reach out and stop him. But when he did his muscles ached, and he felt the tension of the webbing holding him in place. Kai had restrained him even more intensely than before.

"What is this James?" He asked as he cautiously turned it over. For a brief second he looked down the barrel curiously and James almost screamed at him to drop it.

Instead, he kept calm.

"It's called a rifle." James said. "Do yourself a favor. Don't point that end at yourself." He looked down at the grip of the weapon and was glad to see that Kai was holding it by its stock instead. "And keep your fingers out of that little loop."

Kai pointed at the trigger guard. "Does this set it off?" He asked. "Like a crossbow?"

James tried to nod. But the webs stopped him. Still, Kai got the idea. He released it and it slowly floated up in front of James again, held by unseen web strands.

"Tell me something James." He said as he took a position reminiscent of being in a chair despite there not being one. "Why do you have the same kind of weapon as those Golems that killed all the dwarves? And when you say that you have friends coming for you. Who do you mean?"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y2jq4o/wait_is_this_just_gate_239/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (238/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xyco86/wait_is_this_just_gate_237/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Amina and Vickers stood on the same peak that James had only a few days prior. Vickers looked out at the vast expanse of desert below through his rifle's scope.

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"Why?" She asked with a hint of worry.

"I don't know. I just don't." He replied. "It's just... too quiet for me."

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"Hey." He said. "This place got birds? Or is it supposed to?" He asked. He lifted his rifle again and began panning around once more, but higher this time.

"A few species of predatory birds. Plus some carrion scavengers. Yes." She answered. "Why?"

Vickers looked around a moment longer. "Any of em impressively large?"

She thought for a moment. "Better question for Marcos really." She admitted. "I think one of the scavengers is large." She held her arms out as if to demonstrate.

He looked and nodded. "Well." He said. "We're pretty far away. But I don't see any."

"Really?" She asked. "None at all?"

"Couldn't even see a single bird. Big. Small. Nothing." He confirmed.

"Strange." She said as she placed her hand on her chin. "But we are far away like you said. Let's get closer."

He stood up, slinging his rifle as he did. "Yeah." He agreed. "But lets go slow." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the two griffins. "How high can these things fly?"

\----------

"James?" Kai asked as he lightly tapped at James's cheek. "Are you awake?"

James slowly opened his eyes and was startled to see an actual lit room around him. It wasn't lit in the traditional sense that he was used to. No candles or lamps, no torches. There was a fireplace, but its flames were small and relatively weak. They also produced no smoke that he could see, and he couldn't smell them. There were glowing webs all over the ceiling. Kai's doing, he had no doubt.

The room itself was also not normal. For starters it was round. But it also seemed to be made of some kind of opaque, purplish-blue, glass. Or at least that was what the odd web-based lighting made it look like. There were windows, though they were small, and seemed to have a layer of mesh as a barrier between the inside and outside.

"Kai?" He asked. "Where am I?" His head hurt.

"You are in the Koridian fortress town of my people." Kai replied. "Much deeper than you were when I first met you. But you're safe. And your body is almost finished healing."

"Deeper?" He said. Something about that made his head hurt with memory. Without knowing why he added. "Can't go deeper."

Kai looked at him curiously. "Oh. Why's that?" He asked.

James struggled to know why himself. His head pounded, and he felt something move along his forehead, rustling his hair somewhat. He heard a

quick chord played by Kai's instrument. Suddenly his forehead felt as though it had an ice-pack pressed to it. It felt divine.

Then he remembered. His hand reached out, though he wasn't sure why.

"Have to warn them." He said, his lips dry and his throat feeling raw. "The desert. They can't fly into it."

Kai nodded, then grabbed something out of James's sight. A moment later he was pressing a small cup of water to James's lips and letting him sip it. It was cool and refreshing, even if it tasted heavily mineralized and earthy.

"You have friends coming for you?" Kai asked.

James nodded as he eagerly drank at the water.

"Do your friends wear armor?" Kai asked. "Carry weapons similar to your own?"

James nodded. "Yes." He said as he licked his lips.

Suddenly something made the ceiling in front of him darken somewhat. James opened his eyes further and, after a moment of regaining his focus, saw his rifle.

"Is this your weapon James." Kai asked, a hint of menace in his voice now.

James looked at him curiously and was surprised to see the formerly serene, angular, elf face hardened and grim.

"It's.... one of them." James answered. "But... how did you get that? It was in my bottomless bag."

Kai held his hand up and a familiar bag swung into it. But unlike the last time James had seen it, now it had a series of fine, and he was sure spider-wrought, stitches holding it together in several places.

"The bottomless bag that the dwarves had to stabilize, and that I had to help them repair lest it eject its contents all over my webs and potentially cause problems?" Kai asked with a tilted head. "Because it was nearly as damaged as you were?"

"Yeah." James admitted. "That's probably accurate."

Kai took the rifle in his hands awkwardly, James wanted to reach out and stop him. But when he did his muscles ached, and he felt the tension of the webbing holding him in place. Kai had restrained him even more intensely than before.

"What is this James?" He asked as he cautiously turned it over. For a brief second he looked down the barrel curiously and James almost screamed at him to drop it.

Instead, he kept calm.

"It's called a rifle." James said. "Do yourself a favor. Don't point that end at yourself." He looked down at the grip of the weapon and was glad to see that Kai was holding it by its stock instead. "And keep your fingers out of that little loop."

Kai pointed at the trigger guard. "Does this set it off?" He asked. "Like a crossbow?"

James tried to nod. But the webs stopped him. Still, Kai got the idea. He released it and it slowly floated up in front of James again, held by unseen web strands.

"Tell me something James." He said as he took a position reminiscent of being in a chair despite there not being one. "Why do you have the same kind of weapon as those Golems that killed all the dwarves? And when you say that you have friends coming for you. Who do you mean?"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y2jojr/wait_is_this_just_gate_239/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (237/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xxicye/wait_is_this_just_gate_236/)

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He flexed his arm and twitched his secondary thumb. He and James continued moving down the tunnel. Another twitch and he took a seated position as the spiders carried him.

Then he switched his view to the part of the swarm that was engaged with the golems.

Let's see how you like a bit of control. He thought as he saw the large metal creature blast holes into the ranks of his brothers and sisters. His children.

No. He reminded himself again.

"My army." He whispered to himself as he and his ward continued moving down the hall.

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"Boss?" Rodriguez asked from beside him. "You seeing this."

"Ironically." Driscoll said, a hint of frustration on his voice. "It's kind of hard to miss Rod."

The two of them, plus Doc, stood in the tunnel, as close to next to each other as the limited space would allow, firing into the swelling mass of spiders and webbing that was beginning to flood the area.

Before their attacks had been gouging massive holes in the arachnid swarm in front of them. Rodriguez's shotgun had been cutting massive cones of gore in the mess of legs and eyes and webs that had been rapidly encroaching on their space.

Now the shots were hitting mostly empty air and stone. The spiders seeming to dodge out of the way, or at the very least thinning out any time one of the weapons fired. They were still taking damage, but they were minimizing it as best as they could for a mass of, presumably, dumb animals.

"Are spiders supposed to be capable of that kind of shit?" Doc asked in an angry tone that became his go to during a fight he wasn't enjoying.

"On Earth? Fuck no." Driscoll replied. "Too bad that aint where we are."

"What I'd do for a can of raid." Rodriguez weighed in. "Mag's almost dry, gonna switch to the heat."

"Kinda wish you'd already done that." Doc answered. "Covering."

Rodriguez dropped to a knee as the other two continued firing, their view cleared significantly by the lack of a third in their way. They also stopped their rearward march so that they wouldn't leave Rodriguez behind.

"Loaded." Rodriguez said as he hit his slide release. "Spiders, meet fire."

Driscoll watched as his display automatically darkened to save his eyes from the sudden introduction of fire and sparking metal that was the shotgun's dragon's breath rounds.

He smiled as the spiders, despite attempting to dodge, caught aflame.

"Hell yeah." Five said from behind them. "Nice."

The smile was quickly robbed from Driscoll's face as he saw the spiders cover their flaming kin in some kind of spray that quickly doused the majority of the flames. Then they swarmed over the dead and dying charred arachnids and surged back forward.

"Hit em again." He said.

His HUD dimmed again. But this time for only a moment. The spiders dodged as best as they could again, but this time they also preemptively sprayed whatever they'd used to stop the previous conflagration.

"What the fuck man?" Rodriguez said as he readied another shot.

"Hold." Driscoll ordered up. "Pop your black panel."

Rodriguez arrested his movement and a panel opened on his back.

Driscoll reached in and grabbed the small ball with the red band and pulled the tab off it's top.

"Fall back." He said.

"Shit boss." Someone said.

Then he hurled the thermite charge down the hall into the mass of arachnids.

It stopped mid air as it collided with an unseen bit of webbing.

"SHIT!" He yelled. "DOWN!"

"What the fu-" Doc yelled before he instinctively jumped away from the charge.

Then the charge detonated spraying jets of firework-like fire in a spinning pattern as it tried to propel itself but was held in place by the webbing.

Rodriguez began to scream.

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Kai winced as the light and heat of the attack pounded into his mind from thousands of eyes and bodies and minds. His jaw clenched hard enough to make his teeth ache.

At his side his hand spasmed and jerked as it worked the controls of his harp wrapped arm.

Away from whatever that just was. He thought, despite knowing that that was not how his bond worked. He plucked the commands with his hand. *Stay away if they retrieve any more of those.*

Then as his swarm's vision came back in with the arrival of new spiders he saw that the enemies had managed to harm themselves from his webbing's intervention.

His hand lifted as he aimed it in front of him and his vision surged toward the three golems, one of whom was on the ground clutching at its face.

NOW!

\----------

Driscoll latched onto Rodriguez's shoulder and hooked up the recovery cable to the loop there. On his HUD Rodriguez's vitals were flashing read as his heartbeat pounded away and his blood pressure spike. The fact that it was doing so despite his suit's interventions and self medicating mechanisms told him how much pain and fear had to be occurring in the man's mind right now.

"Boss." Five said as she pulled up next to him.

"Get his other side!" Driscoll snarled. "Get him back."

"BOSS!" Doc cut in."

"WHAT!" He snapped back.

"They're coming back!"

Driscoll's feed snapped to the writhing mass that, sure enough, was rushing at them.

He dropped his rifle, letting it hang from its retention lanyard.

He picked up the shotgun and ripped its lanyard and aimed it down the hallway.

The spiders tried to dodge. He engaged the "Simulate Automatic" option on his firing hand.

As the weapon rose to where he wanted it, his finger became a blur.

He intentionally lowered the slider on the sound dampening control a few spaces.

BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BOOM!

CLI-CLI-CLI-CLI-CLICK.

Reported the shotgun as he almost immediately emptied what was left in its magazine.

"MOVE!" He commanded as his feed showed the spiders getting sprayed and torched with no time to dodge the rapid-fire attack.

And the team, for the first time in years, maybe decades, fell back in retreat.

\----------

Kai faltered, and felt beads of sweat drenching the back of his web shirt and forehead as he felt the massacre that his swarm had just been subjected to.

"Shit." He said in a tone of panic as he waited for his view of the scene to return.

"Kuuhh..." Moaned James from beside him, startling him a bit.

"What?" He wondered in surprise. "How are you waking up?" He asked.

"Kuuukai?" James tried to ask.

"Not now Mr. James." He said as more of his spiders made it to the fight and gave him his sight back. He was happy to see the golems retreating away from where they'd just been, their downed comrade dragged between them.

Good. He thought. *Let's pick up some distance before they realize we're not attacking.*

He pulled the mask from his face. It made a slight sucking noise as it retrieved its gemstone eyes.

His hand commanded the swarm to seal the tunnel before they joined him. In the distance they began to gather their dead as well as the stones loosened in the fight. And they began their work.

He told the carrier spiders to move faster as he and James glided through the tunnel.

\---------------

A few minutes after Driscoll and the others had left, a small tunnel opened up near the wall that the spiders had erected. Out of it an angry, tear soaked, blonde dwarf crawled.

She looked around at the burn marks and the handful of forgotten dead spiders that were still there.

She looked down the tunnel in the direction the metal murderers had retreated. Then back at the spider wall.

She bent down and picked up the large metal contraption that had brought death to her brothers before. She sniffed at the odd, shiny, metal tube at the top of it, and the opening that smelled so chemically pungent. She also picked up and inspected one of the small red and brass cylinders that it had ejected after each attack.

"Bastards." She said softly.

Her hands glowed, and another wall formed between her and the retreating enemy's path. Once it was done, she lowered back down and began crawling back through her tunnel. Her enemy's weapon clutched angrily in her hands.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/y1hwt7/wait_is_this_just_gate_238/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (237/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xxiac2/wait_is_this_just_gate_236/) /
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He flexed his arm and twitched his secondary thumb. He and James continued moving down the tunnel. Another twitch and he took a seated position as the spiders carried him.

Then he switched his view to the part of the swarm that was engaged with the golems.

Let's see how you like a bit of control. He thought as he saw the large metal creature blast holes into the ranks of his brothers and sisters. His children.

No. He reminded himself again.

"My army." He whispered to himself as he and his ward continued moving down the hall.

\----------

"Boss?" Rodriguez asked from beside him. "You seeing this?"

"Ironically." Driscoll said, a hint of frustration on his voice. "It's kind of hard to miss Rod."

The two of them, plus Doc, stood in the tunnel, as close to next to each other as the limited space would allow, firing into the swelling mass of spiders and webbing that was beginning to flood the area.

Before their attacks had been gouging massive holes in the arachnid swarm in front of them. Rodriguez's shotgun had been cutting massive cones of gore in the mess of legs and eyes and webs that had been rapidly encroaching on their space.

Now the shots were hitting mostly empty air and stone. The spiders seeming to dodge out of the way, or at the very least thinning out any time one of the weapons fired. They were still taking damage, but they were minimizing it as best as they could for a mass of, presumably, dumb animals.

"Are spiders supposed to be capable of that kind of shit?" Doc asked in an angry tone that became his go to during a fight he wasn't enjoying.

"On Earth? Fuck no." Driscoll replied. "Too bad that aint where we are."

"What I'd do for a can of raid." Rodriguez weighed in. "Mag's almost dry, gonna switch to the heat."

"Kinda wish you'd already done that." Doc answered. "Covering."

Rodriguez dropped to a knee as the other two continued firing, their view cleared significantly by the lack of a third in their way. They also stopped their rearward march so that they wouldn't leave Rodriguez behind.

"Loaded." Rodriguez said as he hit his slide release. "Spiders, meet fire."

Driscoll watched as his display automatically darkened to save his eyes from the sudden introduction of fire and sparking metal that was the shotgun's dragon's breath rounds.

He smiled as the spiders, despite attempting to dodge, caught aflame.

"Hell yeah." Five said from behind them. "Nice."

The smile was quickly robbed from Driscoll's face as he saw the spiders cover their flaming kin in some kind of spray that quickly doused the majority of the flames. Then they swarmed over the dead and dying charred arachnids and surged back forward.

"Hit em again." He said.

His HUD dimmed again. But this time for only a moment. The spiders dodged as best as they could again, but this time they also preemptively sprayed whatever they'd used to stop the previous conflagration.

"What the fuck man?" Rodriguez said as he readied another shot.

"Hold." Driscoll ordered up. "Pop your black panel."

Rodriguez arrested his movement and a panel opened on his back.

Driscoll reached in and grabbed the small ball with the red band and pulled the tab off it's top.

"Fall back." He said.

"Shit boss." Someone said.

Then he hurled the thermite charge down the hall into the mass of arachnids.

It stopped mid air as it collided with an unseen bit of webbing.

"SHIT!" He yelled. "DOWN!"

"What the fu-" Doc yelled before he instinctively jumped away from the charge.

Then the charge detonated spraying jets of firework-like fire in a spinning pattern as it tried to propel itself but was held in place by the webbing.

Rodriguez began to scream.

\----------

Kai winced as the light and heat of the attack pounded into his mind from thousands of eyes and bodies and minds. His jaw clenched hard enough to make his teeth ache.

At his side his hand spasmed and jerked as it worked the controls of his harp wrapped arm.

Away from whatever that just was. He thought, despite knowing that that was not how his bond worked. He plucked the commands with his hand. *Stay away if they retrieve any more of those.*

Then as his swarm's vision came back in with the arrival of new spiders he saw that the enemies had managed to harm themselves from his webbing's intervention.

His hand lifted as he aimed it in front of him and his vision surged toward the three golems, one of whom was on the ground clutching at its face.

NOW!

\----------

Driscoll latched onto Rodriguez's shoulder and hooked up the recovery cable to the loop there. On his HUD Rodriguez's vitals were flashing red as his heartbeat pounded away and his blood pressure spike. The fact that it was doing so despite his suit's interventions and self medicating mechanisms told him how much pain and fear had to be occurring in the man's mind right now.

"Boss." Five said as she pulled up next to him.

"Get his other side!" Driscoll snarled. "Get him back."

"BOSS!" Doc cut in."

"WHAT!" He snapped back.

"They're coming back!"

Driscoll's feed snapped to the writhing mass that, sure enough, was rushing at them.

He dropped his rifle, letting it hang from its retention lanyard.

He picked up the shotgun and ripped its lanyard and aimed it down the hallway.

The spiders tried to dodge. He engaged the "Simulate Automatic" option on his firing hand.

As the weapon rose to where he wanted it, his finger became a blur.

He intentionally lowered the slider on the sound dampening control a few spaces.

BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BO-BOOM!

CLI-CLI-CLI-CLI-CLICK.

Reported the shotgun as he almost immediately emptied what was left in its magazine.

"MOVE!" He commanded as his feed showed the spiders getting sprayed and torched with no time to dodge the rapid-fire attack.

And the team, for the first time in years, maybe decades, fell back in retreat.

\----------

Kai faltered, and felt beads of sweat drenching the back of his web shirt and forehead as he felt the massacre that his swarm had just been subjected to.

"Shit." He said in a tone of panic as he waited for his view of the scene to return.

"Kuuhh..." Moaned James from beside him, startling him a bit.

"What?" He wondered in surprise. "How are you waking up?" He asked.

"Kuuukai?" James tried to ask.

"Not now Mr. James." He said as more of his spiders made it to the fight and gave him his sight back. He was happy to see the golems retreating away from where they'd just been, their downed comrade dragged between them.

Good. He thought. *Let's pick up some distance before they realize we're not attacking.*

He pulled the mask from his face. It made a slight sucking noise as it retrieved its gemstone eyes.

His hand commanded the swarm to seal the tunnel before they joined him. In the distance they began to gather their dead as well as the stones loosened in the fight. And they began their work.

He told the carrier spiders to move faster as he and James glided through the tunnel.

\---------------

A few minutes after Driscoll and the others had left, a small tunnel opened up near the wall that the spiders had erected. Out of it an angry, tear soaked, blonde dwarf crawled.

She looked around at the burn marks and the handful of forgotten dead spiders that were still there.

She looked down the tunnel in the direction the metal murderers had retreated. Then back at the spider wall.

She bent down and picked up the large metal contraption that had brought death to her brothers before. She sniffed at the odd, shiny, metal tube at the top of it, and the opening that smelled so chemically pungent. She also picked up and inspected one of the small red and brass cylinders that it had ejected after each attack.

"Bastards." She said softly.

Her hands glowed, and another wall formed between her and the retreating enemy's path. Once it was done, she lowered back down and began crawling back through her tunnel. Her enemy's weapon clutched angrily in her hands.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/y1hv4c/wait_is_this_just_gate_238/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (236/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xwo6wv/wait_is_this_just_gate_235/)

Writer's note: Yeah. Things are about to go poorly for a lot of people. But also, ***POWER ARMOR FIIIIIIIIGHT!!!!***

BTW u/bamssbam *used some AI to render a dope view of our* [*Main Boi Choi*](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xwq253/stable_diffusion_rendering_of_james/) *over on* r/GATEhouse

Enjoy

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"Okay, send it through in THREE..." Veliry yelled from the other side of the courtyard, her voice amplified by magic so Joey could hear. "TWO..... ONE!"

Joey rushed at the small pig-like creature, startling it into running into the faintly glowing opening on the castle wall. A pair of small mesh and wood fences kept it from running anywhere else. It hit the glowing membrane that marked the "inside" of the bottomless... door.

It paused in confusion for a second, then Joey tapped his foot on its butt. The animal startled and ran all the way through.

"GOT IT!" Veliry said from the other side of the courtyard.

Joey's arms shot up into the air.

"YES!" He yelled, causing the handful of onlookers to look at him. Then his discomfort took over and his hands dropped back to his side.

Joey looked around curiously for a moment, then when he didn't see his mom anywhere he turned back.

"STAY THERE!" He yelled.

"WHAT?" Veliry asked back, having not heard him as well as he could hear her.

Instead of answering Joey leapt into the opening.

And promptly landed on top of the pig thing in a heap.

"JOEY! BY THE-" She began before realizing that she still had her voice magically amplified. She coughed. "By the gods what are you doing?" She helped him up to his feet and he dusted himself off. "Your mother said not to use you for any magical tests."

"We didn't." He replied with a smile. He pointed at the pig creature. "We used that. And the test was successful."

Before Joey realized it, she was up in the air hugging him. His face flushed as he awkwardly hugged back. Then she dropped back to the ground.

"With this we should be able to make travel sooo much quicker." She said as she shooed the creature back through the door. Then she pulled the

cover over and shut it. "Plus this will help us find the Agency." She added.

"And if it can be extended even further than it should massively cut down on nationwide logistics." Joey chimed in. "Which should help a lot with the current refugee problem from the elemental attack. Both in terms of getting them to places they can live, and keeping them fed and supplied."

She looked at him in surprise. She hadn't realized he'd been thinking that far ahead.

"What?" He asked as he looked away.

"Nothing." She replied. "Just... I didn't realize that was something you'd thought of."

Joey scratched his temple in discomfort as he looked down. "I feel bad for them." He said quietly. "I know what that's like. My whole family does."

"They're being well taken care of." Veliry assured him, her focus on the experiment set aside for now. "The King has put a lot of resources toward helping them get back on their feet."

"I know." Joey said with a smile. "But I still want to help."

Veliry matched the smile. "And you will." She said. "Now go seal that door up and then head back to the lab. I've got to go report this to King Farrick. How is the wind magic coming."

Joey held his hands up and aimed them at the ground. He focused for a moment and the hair on his head rustled a little. A small, fairly weak, gust of wind disturbed the grass there.

"Very good." Veliry said with a large smile. "You, Joey, are OFFICIALLY, a mage."

Joey's eyes widened, and the unfelt wind that was messing his hair up intensified and began shaking the hood of his robes.

"Really?" He asked with a look of concern.

Veliry cocked an eyebrow. "You're casting a spell while under the tutelage of an Arch-Mage aren't you?" She asked.

"Yeah." He answered.

"Then you're a mage." She said sternly. "Welcome to the profession." She looked down at where his hands were pointed. "New lesson: Try not to destroy Royal Property. And yes." She shrugged a bit. "I do get how that's hypocritical coming from me."

Joey looked down and was shocked to see the dirt and stones beneath him getting blasted away as if by a pressure washer.

"Shit." He said as he lowered his arms.

He turned to apologize, but his teacher was already jogging toward the castle.

"I'm a mage." He said to himself, a smile spread from ear to ear.

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Driscoll and the other members of his team looked at the spray-crete secured hole in the sand before them.

"Alright." He said over the private channel that only they and, if he wanted, the Major could listen to. "We've got our sonic maps. Scuttlers are already down there getting us even more detail. And we've already got a route to below the impact site."

"Any half a k away." Said Rodriguez, who'd been the one to find the crater in the first place. "Easy route."

Driscoll nodded. "Easy op." He said. "Find the body or trail. Secure. Deal with anything in the way."

The others nodded silently.

"Any volunteers?" He asked rhetorically. They knew he would always be the first to dive. When none of them said anything he nodded himself. "Alright. Let's go."

He jumped up and forward.

Then he dropped the fifteen feet down into the sand coated darkness below.

The pads on the bottom of his suit's feet expanded, flaring out to the sides while also inflating with a bit of water. In normal deep water operations this helped them walk along the silty, muddy floors of the oceans or lakes that they maneuvered across. But in this situation it just helped soften, and silence, the impact of the nearly three hundred Kilogram armor.

His weapon raised as he looked down the lengths of the long passageway. His suit's cameras gave him a visual of the space behind and around him as he did, granting him three hundred sixty degrees of vision and sensor data.

He flicked through his different camera feeds, looking at thermal, night vision, and motion based vision as he did.

"Clear." He said, once he was satisfied that he was alone. He walked a few yards toward their destination. A muffled impact tremor told him that the next member of the team had jumped in too. His HUD told him that it

was Rodriguez, not that that surprised him. Rodriguez panned the other direction as he stepped out of the way as well.

The other members of the team were quick to follow them down as they slowly spread out along the corridor. Only a few minutes later they were all accounted for.

"Hate caves." Milano said after she'd dropped down.

"You got stuck ONE time." Replied Rodriguez.

"I'm claustrophobic." Milano shot back.

"You live inside a tin can." Doc cut in.

"I'd say to maintain silence." Driscoll said over the radio, silencing the others. "But nobody can hear anything we say in these suits anyways. So let me say what I've said a hundred times before when we're on mission-"

"Shut up!" Four of his crew said in unison before he had a chance.

He paused in his tracks and angled his head back.

"If you know it so well, than do it." He said.

"Every time." Doc chimed in.

"You too doc."

"Copy." Doc answered.

The eight of them proceeded in suit imposed silence for another twelve minutes before reaching their destination. Their suits occasionally pinged them with heat or motion warnings on either side of the linear formation, causing Driscoll or Carroll, the rear guard, to pause as they waited for their suits to get a better read on the cause. But so far they'd only ever been minor wildlife, insects or rodents, and nothing worth halting the formation fully.

They stopped only a hundred yards from their intended goal, a sudden offshooting tunnel and a set of tracks giving them pause as they came across it.

The tracks had a trail of dried blood drops trailing along on either side of them.

"Doc." Driscoll said as he forwarded his feed to the group.

"Moving up." Doc replied, not needing to be told what to do.

Getting past the other team members was a hassle, their oversized suits took up most of the space in the tunnel and Doc had to carefully maneuver

around them to get to the site where Driscoll and Rodriguez had taken position, their weapons aimed down each path.

Doc pulled a panel open on his left arm and pulled an attachment out that looked like a small spoon at the end of a straw. He placed the attachment on the index finger of his suit with a soft snap. With it he scooped up some of the sand dried blood. Once he had a large enough sample he froze, the spoon folded in on itself and some of the water from Doc's suit flowed into it, turning the blood and sand into a slurry that his suit analyzed.

"What do we got?" Driscoll asked after a minute.

"Human, lupine....ish.... blood cells look like the ones from the dead locals at the camp. Though the structure is a little.... off." Doc replied.

"Explain." Driscoll prodded.

"Their structure is similar to the locals, but the shape isn't as pronounced. Here I'll show you my view." Doc said as he pulled the attachment off of his finger and placed it back into the panel, where it would clean itself.

Driscoll watched as a view of one of the odd, triangular, blood cells unique to this world appeared on his HUD.

"That's from the locals." Doc said. "We've all seen that before in our briefings."

A second image of a similar blood cell appeared next to it.

"That's the stuff I just scooped." Doc said. "Notice that the points are a bit more rounded, the inner angles not as deep. Plus, it appears to be more damaged than the locals were, even though both samples were dead and dried by the time of their imaging."

"What's that mean?" Driscoll asked. "A different species?"

"Could be." Doc admitted. "Our database on local cell structures is, understandably, incomplete. But the structure analysis still recognizes it as being in line with local human types, with hints of lupine structures. That matches the state of the arm we found. But usually werewolves are either FULL wolf, or heavily humanized. This is more like a mixture of different cells. As if this person was a human AND a fully turned werewolf."

Driscoll's head tilted as he thought, while he did he also pulled up a few files that this was reminding him of.

"Boss?" Carroll asked from the back of the line. "We good."

Driscoll closed the file he'd been looking at.

"I know who it is." He said, causing several of the others too look at him curiously.

"What?" Asked Rodriguez curiously. "Who do you know in this world that that rings a bell."

Driscoll looked down the hall toward where the impact crater was. "Someone who's gone native." He said. He kicked at the bloodied sand on the floor. "And decided to drop by to greet the new neighbors."

The others looked at each-other curiously before an image popped up on their HUD's.

"Shit." Doc said as he realized what he was looking at. He looked back down at the blood. "That makes a lot of sense, actually."

"New mission folks." Driscoll said as he began walking past Rodriguez, brushing a cobweb aside as he did. "Search and.... rescue."

\------------------------

"Kai?" James asked as he groggily woke back up. "Do I still have spiders inside me?"

"Will you faint if I say yes?" Kai asked in return.

"Jury's out." James said. "We'll see." He added when he realized that the phrase likely didn't make sense to the Deep Elf.

"Then... no." Kai replied.

James wanted to argue the obvious lie. But then thought better of it. *Blissful ignorance.* He told himself. *It's fine. Everything's fine.*

"Can I... Can I move?" He asked instead. "How am I doing now?"

There was a familiar cord played by Kai's odd, circular control instrument, and James felt his arms and head release from the grip of the spider that he knew was somewhere on him.

"You are much improved James." Kai said. "You even have most of your hand back."

James looked and, sure enough, he had most of his hand back, though it ended in a few stubby little bits of flesh that he assumed were going to form the long, clawed, fingers he'd grown used to over the past few months.

"Sweeeeet." He said.

"How are you sonny?" Asked a startlingly loud voice that came from right next to him, causing him to jump in surprise.

"JESUS!" He blurted out as he flailed.

Next to him was a short, blonde haired dwarf woman. He recognized her.

"You were.... the one that brought me here." He said as the recognition snapped into place.

"One of them. Yes." She said as she grabbed a plate from somewhere out of James's sight. She held it up in front of James. "We brought you to Weaver here, figured he might be able to save you after those bastards knocked you out of the sky."

James's stomach did a cartwheel as he smelled whatever kind of stew or sauced meat that was on the plate.

"Once again, I am A weaver. Weaver is not my name." Kai said in a mildly scolding tone.

"And once again, aint nobody can say your actual name." The dwarf shot back.

"Then do as Mr. James does and simply call me Kai."

"Who's Mr. James?" The dwarf asked.

"That'd be me. James weighed in weakly as his hands reached for the plate. Then he paused as he realized how useless that was for the left hand. "And it's just James. No mister required."

"James." The dwarf said as she picked up a piece of something on the plate and shoved it into James's mouth. Startled by the sudden intrusion, and surprised by the pain in his jaw, he gagged a bit. "James..... I feel like I know a James." The dwarf continued. "Why does the name James sound a horn for me?"

>!"Ow."!< James said through the piece of.... mushroom(?) as he tenderly chewed and swallowed it.

"Ya happen to be from Goldbrook Mr. James?" The dwarf asked as she picked up another piece of food.

James barely swallowed the first piece of food in time to say "No." before another piece of something that felt like a chunk of rubber. But the savory flavor it exuded once he'd bitten it made his mouth salivate. It tasted like a piece of carne asada, even as his brain struggled with the texture.

"No?" She asked. She looked him over. "No." She agreed. "You're too scrawny to be one o' the brook fishers." She shoved a piece of rock hard bread that was coated in the juices from the plate into his mouth. He hadn't even finished chewing and swallowing the previous piece of food yet.

>!"Ooo-muh."!< He tried to say.

"Lady Dunebasher. Please slow down. I've just barely managed to keep him alive. I don't need you choking him to death." Kai said.

"Oh he'll be fine." The dwarf countered as she raised something to James's mouth.

James spluttered as, remarkably cold, ale sloshed over his face and into his already full mouth.

"See?" She said. "He's takin' his ale."

James forced the food and drink, painfully, down his throat with a large gulp that he struggled to keep down.

"Now how long do ya-" The dwarf began, her hand already grabbing another morsel from the plate.

"Enough!" James interjected. "God damn." He paused as he coughed, trying not to bring any of the food up as he did. "Slow down with the food." He wheezed. "My throat hurts like fuck."

"Not a surprise." The dwarf said with a smile. "You had about ten pounds of sand and blood in it when my cousin pulled you down here."

"You're clan Dunebasher?" James asked as he rubbed his chest. It ached where his hand pressed.

Of to the side Kai's head cocked to the side curiously, though neither of the other two noticed.

"The one and only." The dwarf replied. Then her head dropped a little. "Though... who knows how long that'll last?" She said with a hint of sorrow.

"What?" James asked. "What happened?"

"That's right." She said. "News hasn't gotten out of the valley yet."

"News of what?" James asked. "Kai?" He called as he looked over to the Deep Elf's location on the nearby wall.

"Clan Dunebasher was annihilated." Kai said softly as he looked off into the distance. He lifted his instrument to his ear and plucked several of the chords on it, though James couldn't hear the notes it caused. "Lady Dunebasher and seven others are the only survivors left." He said as he tilted his head closer to the spider webbed device in his hands.

"Is he okay?" James asked the dwarf, who was also looking at Kai curiously.

"Don't know." She admitted. "Only time I've seen him like this is when some of his little critters are about to bag him some dinner in the tunnels. But he's usually not so focused like this."

"Kai?" James asked. "Everything okay?"

"Unfortunately it seems as though Clan Dunebasher's days are fewer than previously expected." He said as he plucked rapidly at the strings, though they still emitted no audible noise.

"What did you say Elf?" The dwarf asked with acid in her tone.

"There are..... eight... golems.... I believe.... heading this way from near where you said you retrieved James's body." Kai said. "They match the appearance of the creatures you and your clan mates said were summoned against you."

"Wha?" James asked. Then he jumped as the plate of food clattered to the ground. James felt some of its contents splash against his back somehow.

He looked over and saw a look of rage on the dwarf's face.

Before he could react she was bolting out of the opening that passed for a door.

"CLAN DUNEBASHER!" She yelled as she exited. As she did she picked up a weapon that looked like the bastard offspring of a pickax and a broadsword. "VENGEANCE!!!"

James faintly heard a series of echoing cries and whoops from outside.

"Kai what the fuck is going on?" James asked as his head snapped back to the elf.

"I do not know if these golems are communicating with each-other." Kai replied. "But one thing is obvious." He plucked a string and began lowering to the ground again. "They are following the trail the dwarves left behind."

He plucked another string and James felt himself lower down and touch the ground. Another pluck and his head and arms were pulled back and held in place again.

"They are coming here." Kai said before James could ask any more questions. "They are coming for you. You are not repaired yet James. We need to leave."

Another pluck of the string, and James was moving across the floor.

"Wait!" James said, though the outburst fell on deaf ears as he kept moving. "How long have I been down here?"

Kai kept his ear pressed to his instrument as he seemed to flow through the room just above the ground. He was plucking at it rapidly.

"KAI!" He yelled now. "HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN DOWN HERE?!?!"

"Five days." Said Kai in an unexpectedly harsh voice. "Now please. I need to hear their plucking." He plucked a string himself, and James felt a pinch in his neck.

"Ow." He said in surprise. "What the..." He suddenly felt dizzy. "Kai didju... dijuuuu..." His tongue and eyelids suddenly felt heavy.

GODDAMIT! *I need to radio back.* He thought as he slipped back into unconsciousness. *They don't kn**^(ow about)* *^(the Miffy's... Need to... tell...)*

Then he was fully under. His mind and his body entered the darkness as Kai and his spiders bore him to safety.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xyct5l/wait_is_this_just_gate_237/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (236/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xwo2vk/wait_is_this_just_gate_235/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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"STAY THERE!" He yelled.

"WHAT?" Veliry asked back, having not heard him as well as he could hear her.

Instead of answering Joey leapt into the opening.

And promptly landed on top of the pig thing in a heap.

"JOEY! BY THE-" She began before realizing that she still had her voice magically amplified. She coughed. "By the gods what are you doing?" She helped him up to his feet and he dusted himself off. "Your mother said not to use you for any magical tests."

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"I know." Joey said with a smile. "But I still want to help."

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"Really?" He asked with a look of concern.

Veliry cocked an eyebrow. "You're casting a spell while under the tutelage of an Arch-Mage aren't you?" She asked.

"Yeah." He answered.

"Then you're a mage." She said sternly. "Welcome to the profession." She looked down at where his hands were pointed. "New lesson: Try not to destroy Royal Property. And yes." She shrugged a bit. "I do get how that's hypocritical coming from me."

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"Shit." He said as he lowered his arms.

He turned to apologize, but his teacher was already jogging toward the castle.

"I'm a mage." He said to himself, a smile spread from ear to ear.

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Driscoll and the other members of his team looked at the spray-crete secured hole in the sand before them.

"Alright." He said over the private channel that only they and, if he wanted, the Major could listen to. "We've got our sonic maps. Scuttlers are already down there getting us even more detail. And we've already got a route to below the impact site."

"Only half a k away." Said Rodriguez, who'd been the one to find the crater in the first place. "Easy route."

Driscoll nodded. "Easy op." He said. "Find the body or trail. Secure. Deal with anything in the way."

The others nodded silently.

"Any volunteers?" He asked rhetorically. They knew he would always be the first to dive. When none of them said anything he nodded himself. "Alright. Let's go."

He jumped up and forward.

Then he dropped the fifteen feet down into the sand coated darkness below.

The pads on the bottom of his suit's feet expanded, flaring out to the sides while also inflating with a bit of water. In normal deep water operations this helped them walk along the silty, muddy floors of the oceans or lakes that they maneuvered across. But in this situation it just helped soften, and silence, the impact of the nearly three hundred Kilogram armor.

His weapon raised as he looked down the lengths of the long passageway. His suit's cameras gave him a visual of the space behind and around him as he did, granting him three hundred sixty degrees of vision and sensor data.

He flicked through his different camera feeds, looking at thermal, night vision, and motion based vision as he did.

"Clear." He said, once he was satisfied that he was alone. He walked a few yards toward their destination. A muffled impact tremor told him that the next member of the team had jumped in too. His HUD told him that it was Rodriguez, not that that surprised him. Rodriguez panned the other direction as he stepped out of the way as well.

The other members of the team were quick to follow them down as they slowly spread out along the corridor. Only a few minutes later they were all accounted for.

"Hate caves." Milano said after she'd dropped down.

"You got stuck ONE time." Replied Rodriguez.

"I'm claustrophobic." Milano shot back.

"You live inside a tin can." Doc cut in.

"I'd say to maintain silence." Driscoll said over the radio, silencing the others. "But nobody can hear anything we say in these suits anyways. So let me say what I've said a hundred times before when we're on mission-"

"Shut up!" Four of his crew said in unison before he had a chance.

He paused in his tracks and angled his head back.

"If you know it so well, than do it." He said.

"Every time." Doc chimed in.

"You too doc."

"Copy." Doc answered.

The eight of them proceeded in suit imposed silence for another twelve minutes before reaching their destination. Their suits occasionally pinged them with heat or motion warnings on either side of the linear formation, causing Driscoll or Carroll, the rear guard, to pause as they waited for their suits to get a better read on the cause. But so far they'd only ever been minor wildlife, insects or rodents, and nothing worth halting the formation fully.

They stopped only a hundred yards from their intended goal, a sudden offshooting tunnel and a set of tracks giving them pause as they came across it.

The tracks had a trail of dried blood drops trailing along on either side of them.

"Doc." Driscoll said as he forwarded his feed to the group.

"Moving up." Doc replied, not needing to be told what to do.

Getting past the other team members was a hassle, their oversized suits took up most of the space in the tunnel and Doc had to carefully maneuver around them to get to the site where Driscoll and Rodriguez had taken position, their weapons aimed down each path.

Doc pulled a panel open on his left arm and pulled an attachment out that looked like a small spoon at the end of a straw. He placed the attachment on the index finger of his suit with a soft snap. With it he scooped up some of the sand dried blood. Once he had a large enough sample he froze, the spoon folded in on itself and some of the water from Doc's suit flowed into it, turning the blood and sand into a slurry that his suit analyzed.

"What do we got?" Driscoll asked after a minute.

"Human, lupine....ish.... blood cells look like the ones from the dead locals at the camp. Though the structure is a little.... off." Doc replied.

"Explain." Driscoll prodded.

"Their structure is similar to the locals, but the shape isn't as pronounced. Here I'll show you my view." Doc said as he pulled the attachment off of his finger and placed it back into the panel, where it would clean itself.

Driscoll watched as a view of one of the odd, triangular, blood cells unique to this world appeared on his HUD.

"That's from the locals." Doc said. "We've all seen that before in our briefings."

A second image of a similar blood cell appeared next to it.

"That's the stuff I just scooped." Doc said. "Notice that the points are a bit more rounded, the inner angles not as deep. Plus, it appears to be more damaged than the locals were, even though both samples were dead and dried by the time of their imaging."

"What's that mean?" Driscoll asked. "A different species?"

"Could be." Doc admitted. "Our database on local cell structures is, understandably, incomplete. But the structure analysis still recognizes it as being in line with local human types, with hints of lupine structures. That matches the state of the arm we found. But usually werewolves are either FULL wolf, or heavily humanized. This is more like a mixture of different cells. As if this person was a human AND a fully turned werewolf."

Driscoll's head tilted as he thought, while he did he also pulled up a few files that this was reminding him of.

"Boss?" Carroll asked from the back of the line. "We good."

Driscoll closed the file he'd been looking at.

"I know who it is." He said, causing several of the others to look at him curiously.

"What?" Asked Rodriguez curiously. "Who do you know in this world that that rings a bell."

Driscoll looked down the hall toward where the impact crater was. "Someone who's gone native." He said. He kicked at the bloodied sand on the floor. "And decided to drop by to greet the new neighbors."

The others looked at each-other curiously before an image popped up on their HUD's.

"Shit." Doc said as he realized what he was looking at. He looked back down at the blood. "That makes a lot of sense, actually."

"New mission folks." Driscoll said as he began walking past Rodriguez, brushing a cobweb aside as he did. "Search and.... rescue."

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"Kai?" James asked as he groggily woke back up. "Do I still have spiders inside me?"

"Will you faint if I say yes?" Kai asked in return.

"Jury's out." James said. "We'll see." He added when he realized that the phrase likely didn't make sense to the Deep Elf.

"Then... no." Kai replied.

James wanted to argue the obvious lie. But then thought better of it. *Blissful ignorance.* He told himself. *It's fine. Everything's fine.*

"Can I... Can I move?" He asked instead. "How am I doing now?"

There was a familiar cord played by Kai's odd, circular control instrument, and James felt his arms and head release from the grip of the spider that he knew was somewhere on him.

"You are much improved James." Kai said. "You even have most of your hand back."

James looked and, sure enough, he had most of his hand back, though it ended in a few stubby little bits of flesh that he assumed were going to form the long, clawed, fingers he'd grown used to over the past few months.

"Sweeeeet." He said.

"How are you sonny?" Asked a startlingly loud voice that came from right next to him, causing him to jump in surprise.

"JESUS!" He blurted out as he flailed.

Next to him was a short, blonde haired dwarf woman. He recognized her.

"You were.... the one that brought me here." He said as the recognition snapped into place.

"One of them. Yes." She said as she grabbed a plate from somewhere out of James's sight. She held it up in front of James. "We brought you to Weaver here, figured he might be able to save you after those bastards knocked you out of the sky."

James's stomach did a cartwheel as he smelled whatever kind of stew or sauced meat that was on the plate.

"Once again, I am A weaver. Weaver is not my name." Kai said in a mildly scolding tone.

"And once again, aint nobody can say your actual name." The dwarf shot back.

"Then do as Mr. James does and simply call me Kai."

"Who's Mr. James?" The dwarf asked.

"That'd be me. James weighed in weakly as his hands reached for the plate. Then he paused as he realized how useless that was for the left hand. "And it's just James. No mister required."

"James." The dwarf said as she picked up a piece of something on the plate and shoved it into James's mouth. Startled by the sudden intrusion, and surprised by the pain in his jaw, he gagged a bit. "James..... I feel

like I know a James." The dwarf continued. "Why does the name James sound a horn for me?"

>!"Ow."!< James said through the piece of.... mushroom(?) as he tenderly chewed and swallowed it.

"Ya happen to be from Goldbrook Mr. James?" The dwarf asked as she picked up another piece of food.

James barely swallowed the first piece of food in time to say "No." before another piece of something that felt like a chunk of rubber. But the savory flavor it exuded once he'd bitten it made his mouth salivate. It tasted like a piece of carne asada, even as his brain struggled with the texture.

"No?" She asked. She looked him over. "No." She agreed. "You're too scrawny to be one o' the brook fishers." She shoved a piece of rock hard bread that was coated in the juices from the plate into his mouth. He hadn't even finished chewing and swallowing the previous piece of food yet.

>!"Ooo-muh."!< He tried to say.

"Lady Dunebasher. Please slow down. I've just barely managed to keep him alive. I don't need you choking him to death." Kai said.

"Oh he'll be fine." The dwarf countered as she raised something to James's mouth.

James spluttered as, remarkably cold, ale sloshed over his face and into his already full mouth.

"See?" She said. "He's takin' his ale."

James forced the food and drink, painfully, down his throat with a large gulp that he struggled to keep down.

"Now how long do ya-" The dwarf began, her hand already grabbing another morsel from the plate.

"Enough!" James interjected. "God damn." He paused as he coughed, trying not to bring any of the food up as he did. "Slow down with the food." He wheezed. "My throat hurts like fuck."

"Not a surprise." The dwarf said with a smile. "You had about ten pounds of sand and blood in it when my cousin pulled you down here."

"You're clan Dunebasher?" James asked as he rubbed his chest. It ached where his hand pressed.

Of to the side Kai's head cocked to the side curiously, though neither of the other two noticed.

"The one and only." The dwarf replied. Then her head dropped a little. "Though... who knows how long that'll last?" She said with a hint of sorrow.

"What?" James asked. "What happened?"

"That's right." She said. "News hasn't gotten out of the valley yet."

"News of what?" James asked. "Kai?" He called as he looked over to the Deep Elf's location on the nearby wall.

"Clan Dunebasher was annihilated." Kai said softly as he looked off into the distance. He lifted his instrument to his ear and plucked several of the chords on it, though James couldn't hear the notes it caused. "Lady Dunebasher and seven others are the only survivors left." He said as he tilted his head closer to the spider webbed device in his hands.

"Is he okay?" James asked the dwarf, who was also looking at Kai curiously.

"Don't know." She admitted. "Only time I've seen him like this is when some of his little critters are about to bag him some dinner in the tunnels. But he's usually not so focused like this."

"Kai?" James asked. "Everything okay?"

"Unfortunately it seems as though Clan Dunebasher's days are fewer than previously expected." He said as he plucked rapidly at the strings, though they still emitted no audible noise.

"What did you say Elf?" The dwarf asked with acid in her tone.

"There are..... eight... golems.... I believe.... heading this way from near where you said you retrieved James's body." Kai said. "They match the appearance of the creatures you and your clan mates said were summoned against you."

"Wha?" James asked. Then he jumped as the plate of food clattered to the ground. James felt some of its contents splash against his back somehow.

He looked over and saw a look of rage on the dwarf's face.

Before he could react she was bolting out of the opening that passed for a door.

"CLAN DUNEBASHER!" She yelled as she exited. As she did she picked up a weapon that looked like the bastard offspring of a pickax and a broadsword. "VENGEANCE!!!"

James faintly heard a series of echoing cries and whoops from outside.

"Kai what the fuck is going on?" James asked as his head snapped back to the elf.

"I do not know if these golems are communicating with each-other." Kai replied. "But one thing is obvious." He plucked a string and began lowering to the ground again. "They are following the trail the dwarves left behind."

He plucked another string and James felt himself lower down and touch the ground. Another pluck and his head and arms were pulled back and held in place again.

"They are coming here." Kai said before James could ask any more questions. "They are coming for you. You are not repaired yet James. We need to leave."

Another pluck of the string, and James was moving across the floor.

"Wait!" James said, though the outburst fell on deaf ears as he kept moving. "How long have I been down here?"

Kai kept his ear pressed to his instrument as he seemed to flow through the room just above the ground. He was plucking at it rapidly.

"KAI!" He yelled now. "HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN DOWN HERE?!?!"

"Five days." Said Kai in an unexpectedly harsh voice. "Now please. I need to hear their plucking." He plucked a string himself, and James felt a pinch in his neck.

"Ow." He said in surprise. "What the..." He suddenly felt dizzy. "Kai didju... dijuuuu..." His tongue and eyelids suddenly felt heavy.

GODDAMIT! *I need to radio back.* He thought as he slipped back into unconsciousness. *They don't kn****^(ow about)* *^(the Miffy's... Need to... tell...)*

Then he was fully under. His mind and his body entered the darkness as Kai and his spiders bore him to safety.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xyco86/wait_is_this_just_gate_237/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (235/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xvq8zf/wait_is_this_just_gate_234/)

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"He should have contacted us by now." Amina said as she sat, staring at the long range radio set that Vickers had turned on for the fourth day now. "Sunrise, noon, sunset. That was when we agreed we'd be on. He should have radioed by now."

Vickers ignored her as best he could as he used a set of headphones and a separate tuner to check the other frequencies. She was right, of course. But feeding her worry was the last thing he needed right now. He'd noticed over the past two days that several of the other frequencies had faint sounds in them that he could occasionally recognize as people speaking. Though they were faint and static laden to the point that he couldn't understand them.

"Where is he?" She asked.

"He might still be looking." Vickers answered, setting down the headset. "maybe this isnt the right mountain range? Any other ranges with enclosed deserts?" He unrolled the map that was set next to the radio set and began looking.

"There's the Salahi desert in the north west." She replied, slowing her pacing down as she thought. Vickers was about to speak when she continued. "But its not fully enclosed. It's western edge is open. Plus nobody in their right mind would set a base there."

"Why not?" He asked curiously as he found what he thought was the desert in question on the map.

"Sand mammoths." She answered as if it was a completely normal, well known, fact.

Vickers ALMOST asked a follow up question, then thought better of it.

"Okay." He said hesitantly. "Not that place. Any chance that he missed this one while he was flying?"

"No." She said simply. "If he had he'd have hit the borreal valley on the other side." She pointed out the swampy, wooded forest on the other side on the map. "Then more mountains. Then the ocean." She shook her head. "Besides, the way he would have been flying, he would have ran into it at its widest point. It's nearly one hundred fifty miles wide at that point. It would've been visible from horizon to horizon. And he'd have had to fly nearly seventy to cross it at that angle. There's no missing that."

Vickers studied the oblong, slightly dog legged, desert on the map. He had to admit that it was a fair point.

"Okay." He said again. "Besides potentially a secret Earth Military base, what else lives in that desert?"

She thought for a moment. "Clan Dunebasher according to the report. A few species of foxling unique to this desert. A unique variant of burrowing hawk. And whatever the deep dark might spit out from time to time, though they never stay there long. Too hot and bright for them."

"Hmmm." Vickers hummed to himself as he thought. He had to admit that the math wasn't adding up. "Wasn't there a patrol that was supposed to go check the 'cartographer camp' thanks to the dwarves?"

"Yes a full long distance patrol unit." She said. "Though unless the message arrived while we were travelling, they haven't come back yet."

"When were they due back?" Vickers followed up.

"A little over a week ago?" She answered.

"Is that normal?"

"For a long range patrol?" She wondered. "It's odd. But not outside of reason. Any number of things can cause that much of a delay. Their official follow up time would be two weeks. At that point another, larger, better equipped unit would be dispatched."

"And," He began. "if they weren't delayed?"

"A long range patrol consists of anywhere from fifteen to thirty people, all of whom would have at least passable combat magic. A good portion of them would be archers or other ranged specialists. There'd be at least five mages and a dedicated healer. The rest would be skilled combat veterans, and they'd usually be led by a Sergeant or Guardian."

"None of that matters if they're up against rifles." Vickers countered.

Amina's eyes widened at the idea.

"Oh no." She said.

Vickers began putting things away. "We leave at first light." He said as he unhooked the headset and put it into his bottomless bag. "We'll leave this going for one last call. But whether he answers or not, we're moving."

Amina simply nodded and left for her room, grabbing her sword from beside the table as she did.

I hope we're both wrong. She thought as she opened the door.

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James awoke to something that sounded oddly musical.

He thought for a moment that he was hearing someone playing an instrument. But there seemed to be no melody to the plucking of the strings. Also the tone and reverberation seemed different.

A harp? He wondered. *Or maybe some weird kind of suitar or something?*

Then the pain returned.

It was everywhere.

"Hrrrrnnnng." He groaned as he tried to move. But his arms stayed fast at his sides. The left one still felt oddly numb, though not as far up as before. The odd, random, notes stopped abruptly. He had the sensation of something suddenly stilling around him.

He opened his eyes, and was startled to find that he could actually see this time.

"You're awake?" Said a halting, faintly masculine voice from somewhere out of sight. "Glad.... to see it."

He was in some kind of room. Though as his eyes moved around (he was glad the left one had decided to join the party) he had the thought that "Room" might have been a touch generous. Where he would've normally expected to see ceiling corners, instead he saw rounded or even jagged slopes. There were also bits of moss, and the occasional stalactite. Odd web-like formations hung from everything, and these seemed to be what was supplying the low level of light that was allowing him to see.

He was in some kind of cave.

"Wh-who..." He began to say, though his throat felt raw and bruised. Most of him did, now that he thought of it. "Who is that?" He struggled to swallow. His throat was so dry. "Where am I?"

Suddenly he felt something move on his face in a way that made him think of an insect. He wanted to brush it away, but like before his arms remained pinned at his sides. Something touched the corner of his mouth and suddenly he felt, and tasted, the flow of some sweet and faintly spicy fluid flow into his mouth.

He tried to fight it. To spit the unexpected intrusion out. But his parched throat and dry tongue worked against him and he drank deeply of the concoction.

"Worry not... little... human." The voice said. "It is safe. You have been without true sustenance for several days now. This shall help.... wean... you back to health."

"Who?" James said, spluttering a bit of the liquid out now that his mouth was re-hydrated. He marveled at the fact that his throat felt so much better now, as if it hadn't been raw only moments before. "Who are you?" He asked again.

"The dwarves brought you to me." The voice answered. "They call me Weaver. Though this is not accurate. I am A... weaver. Weaver is a title.... My title. But not my name."

What the fuck? James wondered.

"Okay." James replied uncertainly. "What's your ACTUAL name then? I'm James by the way."

"James?" It said. "James. James-James." It said, as if testing the name out. "Well met James." It said after a moment. My true name is Shil'Varyon'Kai of Abel'Motky'Eh the Weaver."

Despite knowing four separate languages fluently at this point in his life, James didn't even attempt to repeat the name.

"Got a shorter version?" He asked instead.

The voice stayed silent for a moment. "You may call me Kai." It said finally.

"Okay Kai." James said. "Nice to meet you. I guess. Would you mind explaining what's going on? Why can't I move."

"Well met James." It replied. "As for what is happening, as I have said; the dwarves brought you to me. I am not a healer, as they seem to treat me. But as a weaver I do have the ability to mend flesh. And that is what I have spent the past two days doing for you." James heard another string plucked note, and suddenly he felt his hands and arms gain a bit of movement. "As for your arms? I had to restrain them to prevent you from hurting yourself. Now that you're awake, you can move them freely. Though I will warn against using the left one. I will also admit some level of curiosity as to its nature."

James brought the two arms up to where he could see them, albeit only faintly in the low, blue, light of the room.

His right arm was covered in some kind of waxy looking coating that also glowed the same faint blue as the stuff on the ceiling. As he flexed it, he felt the bruising and lacerations that were still there, though he couldn't see them past the blue material.

His left hand wasn't covered, and he suddenly understood the numb sensation. It ended just above the wrist.

Oddly, it didn't hurt. Once he'd seen the amputation he'd expected the shock of it to wear off and for pain to set in like the rest of his body. But instead, all he felt was a sort of dull, mostly numb, ache.

"I lost my wolf hand." He said softly.

"You lost most of the arm actually." The voice said with what sounded like sorrow to James. "Though, its.... unique... nature has allowed it to grow back quite a bit since you were brought to me."

"It was worse?" James asked.

"It was amputated above the elbow when you were brought here. As I have said, I am most curious as to how you obtained an arm like that."

"It's.... a long story." James said. " A uh.... gift... so to speak, from a goddess."

"The moon goddess no doubt." Kai replied. "Most fascinating."

"What's this blue stuff on my arm?" James asked. He wanted to pluck at it and poke it, but without a left hand he was stuck simply looking at it. Though he did give it a sniff.

"It is binding web." Kai said. "If you wish to know where it comes from you will need to promise not to panic. You humans tend to do that. Or so I've been told. I must admit that you are the first human I have ever encountered in person."

"Web?" James wondered. "Like.... from spiders?"

"Most correct." Kai said with a hint of cheer. "Are you familiar with spiders?"

"Isn't.....everyone?" James asked uncertainly.

"Not to the extent that myself and my people are." Kai replied. James heard another singular music note. "You may move your head."

Sure enough James suddenly felt something loosen, and was able to move his head. He looked down to try to inspect himself, and to try to see Kai. But instead was greeted by eight softly glowing eyes only a few inches below his chin.

James froze. "Uhhh..... Are you..... Kai?" He asked awkwardly.

Kai laughed, and the noise of it echoed throughout the room. James kept his eyes locked on the spider, wondering if that was where the laughter was coming from, and if so, how.

"No." He said with the last few laughs. "I am not a spider. And he name is not Kai. She is a limb stealer spider, and she is the one that has been keeping you immobile while you heal. She has no name that either of us can vocalize. You need not worry."

Kai played several notes in jarring disharmony, and the spider skittered down James's chest and out of sight.

"Uhhhh. Kai?" James asked.

"Yes James?" Kai asked in return.

"I don't have a spider phobia or anything. But I have to admit that I'm getting some real horror movie flashbacks right now. Can I... see you... real quick? I just need to know what I'm dealing with."

"Certainly." Kai replied. "I have only been remaining hidden because most surface dwellers are uncomfortable with nudity. I have been.... well.... living up to my title, and making some clothes for myself. Though I suppose the current amount covers the necessities."

"Oooooookay...." James said uncertainly.

He began craning his head around to try to see Kai. Each movement hurt like his neck had never felt before. He also felt some things grinding from time to time, though he chose to ignore that. Still, he couldn't see the owner of the voice.

"I am right here." Said Kai suddenly.

James's head snapped forward and center.

Hanging from the ceiling above him was an elf with skin darker than anyone he'd ever seen before, even compared to the few Deep Elves he'd seen in the capital. He was bare down to the waist, and James noticed that he was remarkably muscular. His long, slightly wavy, silver hair hung past his head by a few inches. Around his legs he wore what looked like a pair of yoga pants that seemed to be made of a similar material to the wrap on James's arm, though they glowed a dull red instead of blue. And in his left hand he held a small circular item that had a myriad of different length and color strings held taut across it.

A pair of spiders the size of mice rapidly ran around Kai's torso, leaving a set of webs behind them as they went, the web was the same red color as hit pants.

Kai strummed several cords on the circular instrument, and suddenly he was shifting to the right and lowering to the ground next to James.

"Woah." James said in surprise.

"How are you feeling?" Kai asked. "You were very badly injured when the dwarves brought you here."

James watched the large elf lower, spin, and eventually stand next to him.

"I'm.... a lot better than I would have expected given what happened." James said uncertainly. "Are you the one that healed me?"

Kai's face shifted, one eyebrow raising slightly.

"Healed?" He asked. "No. I don't possess healing magic."

"Then how am I alive. I was hit pretty badly. And I had to have fallen pretty far after." James said.

"True on both accounts." Kai agreed. He held up a hand next to himself. "I must admit that my little workers." A spider the size of a cat crawled over his arm and stood on the palm of his hand. "Are the ones that ACTUALLY saved you. I simply told them how."

"The... spiders.... saved me?" James said, staring at the brown and red creature in the Deep Elf's hand.

"Indeed." Kai confirmed. "They knitted you back together. Kept you from moving and agitating your injuries. Helped you with the pain. And, as you just saw a few minutes ago, kept you fed and watered. Though we will have to get you some food with more.... substance... when we can. Spider wine can only do so much for a human body."

"They knitted me back together?" James asked.

"Extensively." Kai confirmed.

"I had to have had gunshot wounds and tons of broken bones." James said. "Plus who knows how much internal bleeding?"

"I don't know what a gunshot is." Kai admitted. "But I will admit that you were in a very bad way."

"And you fixed me?" James asked. "With spiders?... In two days?"

"Well." Kai said. "We're still fixing you. And I suspect that that Werewolf arm had something to do with the rapidity of it as well."

"Still fixing me?" James wondered.

"Oh yes. As you said, you had EXTENSIVE internal bleeding." Kai repeated. "Several of my spiders are repairing that as we speak."

"You..." James began, suddenly feeling dizzy. "You have... spiders.... inside me? Like... right now?"

"Ugh." Kai huffed. "Humans ARE nervous about spiders."

"They shouldn't...." The room began to spin, James worried that maybe a spider was doing that too. "They shouldn't be inside me." He said before passing out.

Kai sat down on a a web padded rock next to James and played a few notes on his control web. The limb stealer spider brought James's head and arms back into place and held them there again.

"I suppose I should let the dwarves know that he woke up." He said. "I was hoping to learn more about him before he went back down." He said as he pouted.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (235/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xvq6xf/wait_is_this_just_gate_234/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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"He should have contacted us by now." Amina said as she sat, staring at the long range radio set that Vickers had turned on for the fourth day now. "Sunrise, noon, sunset. That was when we agreed we'd be on. He should have radioed by now."

Vickers ignored her as best he could as he used a set of headphones and a separate tuner to check the other frequencies. She was right, of course. But feeding her worry was the last thing he needed right now. He'd noticed over the past two days that several of the other frequencies had faint sounds in them that he could occasionally recognize as people speaking. Though they were faint and static laden to the point that he couldn't understand them.

"Where is he?" She asked.

"He might still be looking." Vickers answered, setting down the headset. "maybe this isnt the right mountain range? Any other ranges with enclosed deserts?" He unrolled the map that was set next to the radio set and began looking.

"There's the Salahi desert in the north west." She replied, slowing her pacing down as she thought. Vickers was about to speak when she continued. "But its not fully enclosed. It's western edge is open. Plus nobody in their right mind would set a base there."

"Why not?" He asked curiously as he found what he thought was the desert in question on the map.

"Sand mammoths." She answered as if it was a completely normal, well known, fact.

Vickers ALMOST asked a follow up question, then thought better of it.

"Okay." He said hesitantly. "Not that place. Any chance that he missed this one while he was flying?"

"No." She said simply. "If he had he'd have hit the borreal valley on the other side." She pointed out the swampy, wooded forest on the other side on the map. "Then more mountains. Then the ocean." She shook her head. "Besides, the way he would have been flying, he would have ran into it at its widest point. It's nearly one hundred fifty miles wide at that point. It would've been visible from horizon to horizon. And he'd have had to fly nearly seventy to cross it at that angle. There's no missing that."

Vickers studied the oblong, slightly dog legged, desert on the map. He had to admit that it was a fair point.

"Okay." He said again. "Besides potentially a secret Earth Military base, what else lives in that desert?"

She thought for a moment. "Clan Dunebasher according to the report. A few species of foxling unique to this desert. A unique variant of burrowing hawk. And whatever the deep dark might spit out from time to time, though they never stay there long. Too hot and bright for them."

"Hmmm." Vickers hummed to himself as he thought. He had to admit that the math wasn't adding up. "Wasn't there a patrol that was supposed to go check the 'cartographer camp' thanks to the dwarves?"

"Yes a full long distance patrol unit." She said. "Though unless the message arrived while we were travelling, they haven't come back yet."

"When were they due back?" Vickers followed up.

"A little over a week ago?" She answered.

"Is that normal?"

"For a long range patrol?" She wondered. "It's odd. But not outside of reason. Any number of things can cause that much of a delay. Their official follow up time would be two weeks. At that point another, larger, better equipped unit would be dispatched."

"And," He began. "if they weren't delayed?"

"A long range patrol consists of anywhere from fifteen to thirty people, all of whom would have at least passable combat magic. A good portion of them would be archers or other ranged specialists. There'd be at least five mages and a dedicated healer. The rest would be skilled combat veterans, and they'd usually be led by a Sergeant or Guardian."

"None of that matters if they're up against rifles." Vickers countered.

Amina's eyes widened at the idea.

"Oh no." She said.

Vickers began putting things away. "We leave at first light." He said as he unhooked the headset and put it into his bottomless bag. "We'll leave this going for one last call. But whether he answers or not, we're moving."

Amina simply nodded and left for her room, grabbing her sword from beside the table as she did.

I hope we're both wrong. She thought as she opened the door.

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James awoke to something that sounded oddly musical.

He thought for a moment that he was hearing someone playing an instrument. But there seemed to be no melody to the plucking of the strings. Also the tone and reverberation seemed different.

A harp? He wondered. *Or maybe some weird kind of suitar or something?*

Then the pain returned.

It was everywhere.

"Hrrrrnnnng." He groaned as he tried to move. But his arms stayed fast at his sides. The left one still felt oddly numb, though not as far up as before. The odd, random, notes stopped abruptly. He had the sensation of something suddenly stilling around him.

He opened his eyes, and was startled to find that he could actually see this time.

"You're awake?" Said a halting, faintly masculine voice from somewhere out of sight. "Glad.... to see it."

He was in some kind of room. Though as his eyes moved around (he was glad the left one had decided to join the party) he had the thought that "Room" might have been a touch generous. Where he would've normally expected to see ceiling corners, instead he saw rounded or even jagged slopes. There were also bits of moss, and the occasional stalactite. Odd

web-like formations hung from everything, and these seemed to be what was supplying the low level of light that was allowing him to see.

He was in some kind of cave.

"Wh-who..." He began to say, though his throat felt raw and bruised. Most of him did, now that he thought of it. "Who is that?" He struggled to swallow. His throat was so dry. "Where am I?"

Suddenly he felt something move on his face in a way that made him think of an insect. He wanted to brush it away, but like before his arms remained pinned at his sides. Something touched the corner of his mouth and suddenly he felt, and tasted, the flow of some sweet and faintly spicy fluid flow into his mouth.

He tried to fight it. To spit the unexpected intrusion out. But his parched throat and dry tongue worked against him and he drank deeply of the concoction.

"Worry not... little... human." The voice said. "It is safe. You have been without true sustenance for several days now. This shall help.... wean... you back to health."

"Who?" James said, spluttering a bit of the liquid out now that his mouth was re-hydrated. He marveled at the fact that his throat felt so much better now, as if it hadn't been raw only moments before. "Who are you?" He asked again.

"The dwarves brought you to me." The voice answered. "They call me Weaver. Though this is not accurate. I am A... weaver. Weaver is a title.... My title. But not my name."

What the fuck? James wondered.

"Okay." James replied uncertainly. "What's your ACTUAL name then? I'm James by the way."

"James?" It said. "James. James-James." It said, as if testing the name out. "Well met James." It said after a moment. "My true name is Shil'Varyon'Kai of Abel'Motky'Eh the Weaver."

Despite knowing four separate languages fluently at this point in his life, James didn't even attempt to repeat the name.

"Got a shorter version?" He asked instead.

The voice stayed silent for a moment. "You may call me Kai." It said finally.

"Okay Kai." James said. "Nice to meet you. I guess. Would you mind explaining what's going on? Why can't I move."

"Well met James." It replied. "As for what is happening, as I have said; the dwarves brought you to me. I am not a healer, as they seem to treat

me. But as a weaver I do have the ability to mend flesh. And that is what I have spent the past two days doing for you." James heard another string plucked note, and suddenly he felt his hands and arms gain a bit of movement. "As for your arms? I had to restrain them to prevent you from hurting yourself. Now that you're awake, you can move them freely. Though I will warn against using the left one. I will also admit some level of curiosity as to its nature."

James brought the two arms up to where he could see them, albeit only faintly in the low, blue, light of the room.

His right arm was covered in some kind of waxy looking coating that also glowed the same faint blue as the stuff on the ceiling. As he flexed it, he felt the bruising and lacerations that were still there, though he couldn't see them past the blue material.

His left hand wasn't covered, and he suddenly understood the numb sensation. It ended just above the wrist.

Oddly, it didn't hurt. Once he'd seen the amputation he'd expected the shock of it to wear off and for pain to set in like the rest of his body. But instead, all he felt was a sort of dull, mostly numb, ache.

"I lost my wolf hand." He said softly.

"You lost most of the arm actually." The voice said with what sounded like sorrow to James. "Though, its.... unique... nature has allowed it to grow back quite a bit since you were brought to me."

"It was worse?" James asked.

"It was amputated above the elbow when you were brought here. As I have said, I am most curious as to how you obtained an arm like that."

"It's.... a long story." James said. " A uh.... gift... so to speak, from a goddess."

"The moon goddess no doubt." Kai replied. "Most fascinating."

"What's this blue stuff on my arm?" James asked. He wanted to pluck at it and poke it, but without a left hand he was stuck simply looking at it. Though he did give it a sniff.

"It is binding web." Kai said. "If you wish to know where it comes from you will need to promise not to panic. You humans tend to do that. Or so I've been told. I must admit that you are the first human I have ever encountered in person."

"Web?" James wondered. "Like.... from spiders?"

"Most correct." Kai said with a hint of cheer. "Are you familiar with spiders?"

"Isn't.....everyone?" James asked uncertainly.

"Not to the extent that myself and my people are." Kai replied. James heard another singular music note. "You may move your head."

Sure enough James suddenly felt something loosen, and was able to move his head. He looked down to try to inspect himself, and to try to see Kai. But instead was greeted by eight softly glowing eyes only a few inches below his chin.

James froze. "Uhhh..... Are you..... Kai?" He asked awkwardly.

Kai laughed, and the noise of it echoed throughout the room. James kept his eyes locked on the spider, wondering if that was where the laughter was coming from, and if so, how.

"No." He said with the last few laughs. "I am not a spider. And her name is not Kai. She is a limb stealer spider, and she is the one that has been keeping you immobile while you heal. She has no name that either of us can vocalize. You need not worry."

Kai played several notes in jarring disharmony, and the spider skittered down James's chest and out of sight.

"Uhhhh. Kai?" James asked.

"Yes James?" Kai asked in return.

"I don't have a spider phobia or anything. But I have to admit that I'm getting some real horror movie flashbacks right now. Can I... see you... real quick? I just need to know what I'm dealing with."

"Certainly." Kai replied. "I have only been remaining hidden because most surface dwellers are uncomfortable with nudity. I have been.... well.... living up to my title, and making some clothes for myself. Though I suppose the current amount covers the necessities."

"Oooooookay...." James said uncertainly.

He began craning his head around to try to see Kai. Each movement hurt like his neck had never felt before. He also felt some things grinding from time to time, though he chose to ignore that. Still, he couldn't see the owner of the voice.

"I am right here." Said Kai suddenly.

James's head snapped forward and center.

Hanging from the ceiling above him was an elf with skin darker than anyone he'd ever seen before, even compared to the few Deep Elves he'd seen in the capital. He was bare down to the waist, and James noticed that he was remarkably muscular. His long, slightly wavy, silver hair hung past his head by a few inches. Around his legs he wore what looked like a pair of yoga pants that seemed to be made of a similar material to the wrap on James's arm, though they glowed a dull red instead of blue.

And in his left hand he held a small circular item that had a myriad of different length and color strings held taut across it.

A pair of spiders the size of mice rapidly ran around Kai's torso, leaving a set of webs behind them as they went, the web was the same red color as his pants.

Kai strummed several cords on the circular instrument, and suddenly he was shifting to the right and lowering to the ground next to James.

"Woah." James said in surprise.

"How are you feeling?" Kai asked. "You were very badly injured when the dwarves brought you here."

James watched the large elf lower, spin, and eventually stand next to him.

"I'm.... a lot better than I would have expected given what happened." James said uncertainly. "Are you the one that healed me?"

Kai's face shifted, one eyebrow raising slightly.

"Healed?" He asked. "No. I don't possess healing magic."

"Then how am I alive. I was hit pretty badly. And I had to have fallen pretty far after." James said.

"True on both accounts." Kai agreed. He held up a hand next to himself. "I must admit that my little workers." A spider the size of a cat crawled over his arm and stood on the palm of his hand. "Are the ones that ACTUALLY saved you. I simply told them how."

"The... spiders.... saved me?" James said, staring at the brown and red creature in the Deep Elf's hand.

"Indeed." Kai confirmed. "They knitted you back together. Kept you from moving and agitating your injuries. Helped you with the pain. And, as you just saw a few minutes ago, kept you fed and watered. Though we will have to get you some food with more.... substance... when we can. Spider wine can only do so much for a human body."

"They knitted me back together?" James asked.

"Extensively." Kai confirmed.

"I had to have had gunshot wounds and tons of broken bones." James said. "Plus who knows how much internal bleeding?"

"I don't know what a gunshot is." Kai admitted. "But I will admit that you were in a very bad way."

"And you fixed me?" James asked. "With spiders?... In two days?"

"Well." Kai said. "We're still fixing you. And I suspect that that Werewolf arm had something to do with the rapidity of it as well."

"Still fixing me?" James wondered.

"Oh yes. As you said, you had EXTENSIVE internal bleeding." Kai repeated. "Several of my spiders are repairing that as we speak."

"You..." James began, suddenly feeling dizzy. "You have... spiders.... inside me? Like... right now?"

"Ugh." Kai huffed. "Humans ARE nervous about spiders."

"They shouldn't...." The room began to spin, James worried that maybe a spider was doing that too. "They shouldn't be inside me." He said before passing out.

Kai sat down on a a web padded rock next to James and played a few notes on his control web. The limb stealer spider brought James's head and arms back into place and held them there again.

"I suppose I should let the dwarves know that he woke up." He said. "I was hoping to learn more about him before he went back down." He said as he pouted.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xxiac2/wait_is_this_just_gate_236/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (234/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xuych6/wait_is_this_just_gate_233/)

Writer's note: Yeah yeah, plot armor and what not. It's not like you guys didn't see his survival coming. I'm like the gods of the setting (though less of a dick, at least in my opinion), Choi doesn't die until he's done with the story he's in. And yes, there are some Chekov's guns sprinkled into this chapter. You don't always need to point them out.

Enjoy.

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Batty smiled as he saw the Chois enter his room.

He was propped up against the headboard of his bed with a couple of pillows and had just gotten done with another healing session only a few minutes earlier. He still didn't know what he thought of the odd people running the so-called healing ward. He also didn't completely believe in the amber glow of the healing "spells" that they cast on his wounded abdomen, though he couldn't deny the effects of them either.

"Batty!" Joey exclaimed as he ran forward and hugged the wounded soldier. He quickly withdrew when he heard the gasp of pain that Batista emitted from the embrace. "Sorry." He said as he pulled back.

"All good dude." Batty said as he adjusted himself.

"We're so glad to hear that you're awake." Mrs. Choi said with a look of worry. "How are you?"

Batty considered his situation.

"I'm.... alive." He said uncertainly. He gestured at the room around him. "I don't know what the hell all this is. It seems like some kind of hallucination. But I don't think I'd hallucinate this kind of pain," He placed a hand on his vastly disfigured stomach. "if I was dreaming. Plus I always have my normal leg in my dreams."

He laughed a little, cringing as the motion made his stomach hurt again. Then he saw the looks on their faces. The discomfort.

"Hey." He said with a touch of effort. "I'm just glad I got you guys through. That was the job."

"We owe you." Mrs. Choi said with a weak smile. "You almost got killed to bring us here. And now We've got James back."

"And I'm learning magic." Joey said with a beaming smile.

Batty's eyebrows furrowed at the addition. "For real?" He asked. Joey nodded. "That's pretty fuckin' cool." He cringed at the expletive. Then he fell back a bit. "So magic is real?" He wondered.

"It is here." Mrs. Choi "And its.... a lot."

"I've seen a bit." He said. "They... use it on my stomach." He moved his head in an uncertain gesture. "It works... mostly."

"How bad is it?" She asked.

He shrugged slightly. "Could be worse." He admitted. "Coulda been crippled. But I can still feel and move my legs." He grunted with some effort as he wiggled his toes, causing the blankets to shake and flutter around them. "Well, you know.... one leg. The fake one would move no matter what."

"That's good." Mrs. Choi agreed.

"Yeah. They said it'll be a while before we know how my stomach is doing. They got all the guts more or less back in place and duct taped together. Lost a few feet of intestine and one of my kidneys. Plus some other stuff I don't know much about. I aint got the schooling that you or your son have. Didn't sound good though." He used his arms to pull himself up a bit more. He winced and his jaw hardened from clenching against the pain. "Muscles are shredded." He added. "And not in the

sexy, get-chicks-at-the-beach kinda way. Hence all the difficulty moving."

"I'm sorry." She said as she placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't be." He said with a smile. "I did it to help my boy Choi. I'd do it again. Although I'd probably dodge." He said with a look of introspection. "Besides, they said he helped out when they first got me in here. Said he probably saved my life."

"Really?" Joey asked. "How?"

Batty shrugged. "Based on what they explained, it sounds like he hooked up a shitload of I.V.'s and even gave me some of his own blood. They said the blood was probably what did the most good too."

"His blood?" Joey wondered. "Really?"

Batty nodded. "Yep. They said that a combination of his, and I'm quoting here, MAGICALLY SATURATED blood made their healing magic more effective once it was inside me. Plus they think that his WEREWOLF ARM???" He looked at the two of them with a dubious expression. "Might have given me some limited regenerative capability?" He let the words sink in for a moment. "Does Choi have a werewolf arm now? Is that a thing?"

"He totally does." Joey said with a massive smile. "It's so awesome. It's kinda like something out of an anime."

"Okay." Batty said. "I'm gonna need to be caught up on some stuff." He placed a hand on Joey's shoulder, startling him somewhat. "You give me the info." He pointed at Mrs. Choi. "You keep him from spiraling out of control."

"I'll.... do what I can." Mrs. Choi replied. "Doubt it'll work though."

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Nguyen watched as the Major became increasingly agitated by the search for the downed flyer.

It had been two hours since Driscoll and the other Muck Marchers, along with a small contingent of the other military personnel, had left on the search for the intruder. And so far, nothing had been found.

The command tent had grown awkwardly silent as the search had continued.

The Major, naturally, was the one who broke that silence.

"Get Corporal Johannsen on the radio." She said from where she was standing, staring at the different feeds.

"Yes ma'am." Replied the young soldier at the communication desk. "Corporal Johannsen, this is command, come in."

"Yeah. Johannsen here." The marine replied a moment later. "What's going on?"

The Major stepped up next to the comm tech and grabbed the handset.

"Johannsen this is the Major. How certain are you that the target was downed?" The way she asked the question made it sound almost like an accusation. The Corporal on the other end seemed to sense as much.

"Well ma'am." Johannsen shot back, a tone of snark that made Nguyen wince evident in his voice. "I didn't double tap like I normally would because you restricted ammo expenditures." He continued. "But you were in here when I dropped him. You saw the damage. AND you saw the enhanced footage once the rigs had parsed the data a bit better. Plus the other two triangulated the fall site." He paused for a moment, and without knowing it because of his lack of visual, cut off the Major's response before she started. "He was surrounded by debris and missing an arm. Plus he was in freefall. Probably dead. But at the very least unconscious. And nobody survives that kinda fall."

Nguyen watched her think. She HAD been in the tent with Johannsen when he'd hit the target. And Nguyen had seen the same footage. Whoever it had been, flying through the air, they'd definitely been chewed up by the incoming stream of intercepting fire.

The Major was about to speak when she was cut off again. Nguyen watched her jaw clench in frustration until she recognized the voice.

"Found it." Said Driscoll from wherever he was out in the desert. "Rodriguez found the impact site. Check his feed." He added. "Bit of an issue though."

Everyone in the command tent looked over at the monitor, one of the soldiers brought the feed in question onto the main screen.

The image it showed reminded Nguyen of.... something. Something he'd seen once, though he couldn't place it at the moment. It looked like a cone of collapsed sand. As if someone had dug a hole or, in this case, blasted one out and it had fallen back in on itself.

"Where is he?" The Major asked, her jaw clenched again.

In the collapsed hole was blood coated sand. Lots of blood coated sand. There was also debris; what looked like a bunch of bits of broken chain, some bits and pieces that looked like armor or padded clothing, a section of some kind of blade, maybe a sword or a long knife. And in the middle of the hole, was the lower half of an arm, covered in singed fur, and ending in a set of wicked clawed fingers, though two were missing.

Then the memory clicked within his mind. The images of a documentary he'd watched in middle school biology snapping into place as he looked at the hole.

"Antlions." He muttered to himself.

"What?" The Major asked.

He shook his head as he remembered her presence. And anger at the current situation.

"Nothing. Just... an old memory." He gestured for the handset she was holding.

She seemed to think for a moment, then handed it to him warily.

"Chief Rodriguez, First Sergeant Nguyen. Any sign of an exit?" He asked.

The feed panned around for a few moments, looking at the area around the hole.

"None that I can see First Sergeant. Sensors don't pick up any trails either." Rodriguez replied in a deep and scratchy voice.

"Your rigs have sensors that can penetrate underground right?" Nguyen asked.

"Ehhh. We do. But they work a lot better under water." Rodriguez said.

"What are you getting at Nguyen?" Driscoll chimed in.

"Remember how you got here Chief?" Nguyen asked. "The fight? We didn't get all the dwarves. And we haven't seen any leave via the pass."

Next to him he saw the Major realize where he was going. He continued.

"They used this desert as an entry point to the Deep Dark." He said. "And they specialized, as you saw on arrival, in magic that helped them move through the sand."

"Riiiiight." Driscoll replied. "That underground web of horror filled tunnels you guys got some minor intel about before you got to this desert." He paused as they all saw his feed show him nearing the site. "Shit." He added as he got to it.

"My rig is sensing an air pocket roughly twenty below." Rodriguez cut in.

"Fuck!" The Major exclaimed as she turned around with her hands on her head.

"We'll start sounding out an entrance." Driscoll said over the radio. "We'll figure out an op and see if he's still down there."

\------------------------

James awoke to three things in descending levels of importance:

1: Pain.

2: Complete and utter darkness.

3: The sound of shuffling feet.

The first of these he understood. He remembered the struggle to maneuver through the air, blasting and jetting his way around the sky as he attempted to avoid the incoming fire. He remembered turning and realizing how he'd been played by whoever was operating the Miffy's down below. He remembered the last act of defiant resistance as he'd seen his impending end.

As a result, the ability to wake into a world of pain came as a surprise to him. Not a pleasant one. Not in the state that his body was telling him he was in. But at the very least, it was a welcome one.

The second of these issues was a touch more troubling. He blinked, though it felt as though his left eye didn't want too, and still saw nothing. He wanted to rub his eyes, but neither arm would respond to it. His right arm screamed in pain, and his left arm felt oddly numb. He began to wonder if he had gone blind. Though, he supposed that wasn't the worst trade off considering what he'd somehow miraculously managed to survive.

Lastly, he had the issue of the noise around him.

It was muffled on his left side, and he wondered if his ear on that side was having the same kind of issue his eye and arm were. The noise was still recognizable, though it echoed oddly, and as his pain addled mind focused he estimated that there had to be at least three people around him, maybe more, but the echoes made it difficult. The throbbing pain of bobbing up and down helped him realize that he was being moved somewhere, though he couldn't feel how.

He needed to know more.

^("Wh-") He began. But he was cut off by a dreadful pain in his chest as he tried to speak. Something inside him was moving, and it wasn't supposed to. He tried again. ^("Who?")

One of the shuffling people paused, he could tell that much. But a gruff, yet understandable, voice prodded them back into movement.

"Get a move on. We gotta get 'im to Weaver fast." The voice said.

"Just thought I heard something." The stopper said as they began moving again.

Dammit. James thought as he tried to breath through the pain of whatever had happened to him.

^("Wh-") He began again. He winced as he felt the moving thing inside of him move again from his breathing. Something was broken in there. Probably a lot of things. "Who?" He forced out in a raspingly painful voice.

"Holy hells." The first voice said as they all came to a sudden stop. "He's awake."

Suddenly. Painfully. James saw a familiar light. It was amber gold in color as it encompassed a small, but broad and rough looking, hand. The light made his eyes hurt, even as it made him happy that he could see, though only barely on his left side. It rose up over his eyes and he knew what was coming. It had happened startlingly often since he'd come to this world.

But he needed to see who was around him. His pained, half broken, mind focused on that goal.

And he saw four dwarves, that he didn't recognize, surrounding him.

"Quiet lad." The owner of the hand said. "You're lucky to live, much less wake." The dwarf woman said as she pressed the hand to his eyes.

James felt the calm, pain lessening, sleepiness of a healing rest begin to take him.

"Who?" He asked weakly just as he began to fade back out.

"Friends." The first voice said. "Anyone THEY attack, is a friend of ours. What few we have down here."

Then James was back in the darkness again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xwo6wv/wait_is_this_just_gate_235/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (234/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xuyavl/wait_is_this_just_gate_233/) /
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"That's good." Mrs. Choi agreed.

"Yeah. They said it'll be a while before we know how my stomach is doing. They got all the guts more or less back in place and duct taped together. Lost a few feet of intestine and one of my kidneys. Plus some other stuff

I don't know much about. I aint got the schooling that you or your son have. Didn't sound good though." He used his arms to pull himself up a bit more. He winced and his jaw hardened from clenching against the pain. "Muscles are shredded." He added. "And not in the sexy, get-chicks-at-the-beach kinda way. Hence all the difficulty moving."

"I'm sorry." She said as she placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't be." He said with a smile. "I did it to help my boy Choi. I'd do it again. Although I'd probably dodge." He said with a look of introspection. "Besides, they said he helped out when they first got me in here. Said he probably saved my life."

"Really?" Joey asked. "How?"

Batty shrugged. "Based on what they explained, it sounds like he hooked up a shitload of I.V.'s and even gave me some of his own blood. They said the blood was probably what did the most good too."

"His blood?" Joey wondered. "Really?"

Batty nodded. "Yep. They said that a combination of his, and I'm quoting here, MAGICALLY SATURATED blood made their healing magic more effective once it was inside me. Plus they think that his WEREWOLF ARM???" He looked at the two of them with a dubious expression. "Might have given me some limited regenerative capability?" He let the words sink in for a moment. "Does Choi have a werewolf arm now? Is that a thing?"

"He totally does." Joey said with a massive smile. "It's so awesome. It's kinda like something out of an anime."

"Okay." Batty said. "I'm gonna need to be caught up on some stuff." He placed a hand on Joey's shoulder, startling him somewhat. "You give me the info." He pointed at Mrs. Choi. "You keep him from spiraling out of control."

"I'll.... do what I can." Mrs. Choi replied. "Doubt it'll work though."

\-------------------------

Nguyen watched as the Major became increasingly agitated by the search for the downed flyer.

It had been two hours since Driscoll and the other Muck Marchers, along with a small contingent of the other military personnel, had left on the search for the intruder. And so far, nothing had been found.

The command tent had grown awkwardly silent as the search had continued.

The Major, naturally, was the one who broke that silence.

"Get Corporal Johannsen on the radio." She said from where she was standing, staring at the different feeds.

"Yes ma'am." Replied the young soldier at the communication desk. "Corporal Johannsen, this is command, come in."

"Yeah. Johannsen here." The marine replied a moment later. "What's going on?"

The Major stepped up next to the comm tech and grabbed the handset.

"Johannsen this is the Major. How certain are you that the target was downed?" The way she asked the question made it sound almost like an accusation. The Corporal on the other end seemed to sense as much.

"Well ma'am." Johannsen shot back, a tone of snark that made Nguyen wince, evident in his voice. "I didn't double tap like I normally would because you restricted ammo expenditures." He continued. "But you were in here when I dropped him. You saw the damage. AND you saw the enhanced footage once the rigs had parsed the data a bit better. Plus the other two triangulated the fall site." He paused for a moment, and without knowing it because of his lack of visual, cut off the Major's response before she started. "He was surrounded by debris and missing an arm. Plus he was in freefall. Probably dead. But at the very least unconscious. And nobody survives that kinda fall."

Nguyen watched her think. She HAD been in the tent with Johannsen when he'd hit the target. And Nguyen had seen the same footage. Whoever it had been, flying through the air, they'd definitely been chewed up by the incoming stream of intercepting fire.

The Major was about to speak when she was cut off again. Nguyen watched her jaw clench in frustration until she recognized the voice.

"Found it." Said Driscoll from wherever he was out in the desert. "Rodriguez found the impact site. Check his feed." He added. "Bit of an issue though."

Everyone in the command tent looked over at the monitor, one of the soldiers brought the feed in question onto the main screen.

The image it showed reminded Nguyen of.... something. Something he'd seen once, though he couldn't place it at the moment. It looked like a cone of collapsed sand. As if someone had dug a hole or, in this case, blasted one out and it had fallen back in on itself.

"Where is he?" The Major asked, her jaw clenched again.

In the collapsed hole was blood coated sand. Lots of blood coated sand. There was also debris; what looked like a bunch of bits of broken chain, some bits and pieces that looked like armor or padded clothing, a section of some kind of blade, maybe a sword or a long knife. And in the middle of the hole, was the lower half of an arm, covered in singed fur, and ending in a set of wicked clawed fingers, though two were missing.

Then the memory clicked within his mind. The images of a documentary he'd watched in middle school biology snapping into place as he looked at the hole.

"Antlions." He muttered to himself.

"What?" The Major asked.

He shook his head as he remembered her presence. And anger at the current situation.

"Nothing. Just... an old memory." He gestured for the handset she was holding.

She seemed to think for a moment, then handed it to him warily.

"Chief Rodriguez, First Sergeant Nguyen. Any sign of an exit?" He asked.

The feed panned around for a few moments, looking at the area around the hole.

"None that I can see First Sergeant. Sensors don't pick up any trails either." Rodriguez replied in a deep and scratchy voice.

"Your rigs have sensors that can penetrate underground right?" Nguyen asked.

"Ehhh. We do. But they work a lot better under water." Rodriguez said.

"What are you getting at Nguyen?" Driscoll chimed in.

"Remember how you got here Chief?" Nguyen asked. "The fight? We didn't get all the dwarves. And we haven't seen any leave via the pass."

Next to him he saw the Major realize where he was going. He continued.

"They used this desert as an entry point to the Deep Dark." He said. "And they specialized, as you saw on arrival, in magic that helped them move through the sand."

"Riiiiight." Driscoll replied. "That underground web of horror filled tunnels you guys got some minor intel about before you got to this desert." He paused as they all saw his feed show him nearing the site. "Shit." He added as he got to it.

"My rig is sensing an air pocket roughly twenty below." Rodriguez cut in.

"Fuck!" The Major exclaimed as she turned around with her hands on her head.

"We'll start sounding out an entrance." Driscoll said over the radio. "We'll figure out an op and see if he's still down there."

\------------------------

James awoke to three things in descending levels of importance:

1: Pain.

2: Complete and utter darkness.

3: The sound of shuffling feet.

The first of these he understood. He remembered the struggle to maneuver through the air, blasting and jetting his way around the sky as he attempted to avoid the incoming fire. He remembered turning and realizing how he'd been played by whoever was operating the Miffy's down below. He remembered the last act of defiant resistance as he'd seen his impending end.

As a result, the ability to wake into a world of pain came as a surprise to him. Not a pleasant one. Not in the state that his body was telling him he was in. But at the very least, it was a welcome one.

The second of these issues was a touch more troubling. He blinked, though it felt as though his left eye didn't want too, and still saw nothing. He wanted to rub his eyes, but neither arm would respond to it. His right arm screamed in pain, and his left arm felt oddly numb. He began to wonder if he had gone blind. Though, he supposed that wasn't the worst trade off considering what he'd somehow miraculously managed to survive.

Lastly, he had the issue of the noise around him.

It was muffled on his left side, and he wondered if his ear on that side was having the same kind of issue his eye and arm were. The noise was still recognizable, though it echoed oddly, and as his pain addled mind focused he estimated that there had to be at least three people around him, maybe more, but the echoes made it difficult. The throbbing pain of bobbing up and down helped him realize that he was being moved somewhere, though he couldn't feel how.

He needed to know more.

^("Wh-") He began. But he was cut off by a dreadful pain in his chest as he tried to speak. Something inside him was moving, and it wasn't supposed to. He tried again. ^("Who?")

One of the shuffling people paused, he could tell that much. But a gruff, yet understandable, voice prodded them back into movement.

"Get a move on. We gotta get 'im to Weaver fast." The voice said.

"Just thought I heard something." The stopper said as they began moving again.

Dammit. James thought as he tried to breath through the pain of whatever had happened to him.

^("Wh-") He began again. He winced as he felt the moving thing inside of him move again from his breathing. Something was broken in there. Probably a lot of things. "Who?" He forced out in a raspingly painful voice.

"Holy hells." The first voice said as they all came to a sudden stop. "He's awake."

Suddenly. Painfully. James saw a familiar light. It was amber gold in color as it encompassed a small, but broad and rough looking, hand. The light made his eyes hurt, even as it made him happy that he could see, though only barely on his left side. It rose up over his eyes and he knew what was coming. It had happened startlingly often since he'd come to this world.

But he needed to see who was around him. His pained, half broken, mind focused on that goal.

And he saw four dwarves, that he didn't recognize, surrounding him.

"Quiet lad." The owner of the hand said. "You're lucky to live, much less wake." The dwarf woman said as she pressed the hand to his eyes.

James felt the calm, pain lessening, sleepiness of a healing rest begin to take him.

"Who?" He asked weakly just as he began to fade back out.

"Friends." The first voice said. "Anyone THEY attack, is a friend of ours. What few we have down here."

Then James was back in the darkness again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xwo2vk/wait_is_this_just_gate_235/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (233/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xs8w8e/wait_is_this_just_gate_232/)

Writer's note: Usually when I introduce a new weapon, or vehicle, or some other aspect of the military in this setting, y'all eat that shit up and ask me twenty billion questions that I either answer vaguely or outright ignore.

But when I introduced the Miffy you guys were REMARKABLY quiet.

Well. Now you're learning what they are first hand. Or rather, James is.

Enjoy.

Edit: I forgot to tell yall that I posted a visual for everyone's favorite manic-pixie-dream-[*mage*](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xsittb/combine_these_two_images_and_make_em_about_50_to/) *on* r/GATEhouse

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That's gotta be it. James thought as he spotted the desert that fit the description they'd been given by the General's message. *Took four days instead of three, but that's alright. Knew it might be difficult.* Adjusting his angle, and his casting focus, he lowered himself down a few hundred feet as he flew. He wiped some of the grime off of his goggles, which he'd bought at one of the towns on the way, with a gloved hand and looked down.

Wow, lot bigger than I thought.

He landed on a peak at the edge of the desert. It wasn't the largest, he could see one on the southern side that had to be almost twice its size. But he wanted to see just what he could see.

He pulled the pouch with the glasses out and checked to make sure that the signal blocking mesh was properly secured, not that they had much signal out here. Or at least they shouldn't. Seeing that it was still tightly fastened, he placed the glasses on his face and hit the button that turned them on. He pulled a piece of jerky out and chewed it just as he did.

His vision quickly darkened as the glasses went through their initial, though fairly quick, boot-up process. Once they were done with that he saw quick pinpricks of light lance into his eyes as the glasses user-facing sensors adjusted to his vision. He and Joey had both gotten lucky, neither of them had ended up with their father's eyes. He'd had to get surgery to fix his vision before either of them had been born. But James and Joey both saw fine without glasses.

Once the glasses had adjusted to him he turned the knob built into the left side of the frame. He watched, with only a slightly awestruck smile, as the glasses zoomed in on the landscape in front of him. But like any other digital camera, the view grew grainier and more pixelated as he zoomed. He found a happy medium, where the multiple cameras had zoomed enough to actually be useful while still being clear enough to see details, and then he began flipping through the different visual spectrums.

After a few minutes of panning around, James sighed. This was gonna be harder than he thought.

He wasn't surprised. It was, as he'd already noticed, a fairly large desert. Even with his position at least a mile up above it, human vision, enhanced or not, could only see so far. He finished the piece of jerky, drank a bit of water, and began gathering energy into his legs again.

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Corporal Johannsen sipped at his re-hydrated cider absently as he watched the M.F.F.V. monitoring screens.

When he'd signed on with the corps he'd done so for the same reason a lot of young men did. He'd needed to get out of the place he'd been living and have a solid job that got him three hot meals and cot all to himself. The fact that he was a born brawler and a damn good driver had only helped him during his training, and when he'd learned that he was going to be operating an Miffy he'd been excited.

He'd forgotten that once set in their positions, M.F.F.V.'s were almost entirely automated.

That fact had been driven home very quickly once he'd gotten past boot and into job specific training. Only the first week or so had been about actually OPERATING the vehicles. The other month and a half had been focused on learning how to read their, admittedly complex, control panels and how to designate targets.

In short, Johannsen had been taught how to play Asteroid on a two and a half million dollar anti-armor interception and defense vehicle with an interface that looked less like a video game and more like the control panel to a fighter jet, but with a shittier view.

His pride had been the only thing that had prevented him from intentionally failing his way into a different field. That and the fact that he'd found one of his instructors incredibly hot, and had wanted to impress him, though sadly the SSgt in question had been straight..... and married.

If anything he'd ended up being TOO GOOD at operating the M.F.F.V. interface and controls.

Now, he was in a different world, answering to an Army Major of all people, sitting in a godforsaken desert, staring at a panel that was never going to light up with an incoming enemy drone, or jet, or missile, or.... well... anything really. Hell, he hadn't even pinged any local birds.

This posting sucked.

He spun around in his chair as he reflected on the luck of a jarhead in fantasyland.

He was so bored and half tired that he missed the blinking red light the first time he'd spun past it.

But on the second spin he saw it, and his legs quickly shot down to the rubber mat beneath him and arrested his rotation. He quickly turned back and... sure enough... there was incoming.

He flipped the toggle that activated the radio built into the panel.

"Hey.... uhhh. First Sergeant. It's Johannsen at the Miffy controls." He said uncertainly. "We got incoming."

"Say again Johannsen." Nguyen's voice crackled through the radio set. *"You say we got incoming?"*

"Sure do First Sergeant." He replied. "Want me to patch a barrel feed to your tab?"

"You can do that?" Nguyen asked. Johannsen resisted the urge to get snarky. Of course the Miffy's could do that. *"Yeah. Uh... send it over I guess."*

"Copy. I'll pull up the best visual." He said as he began switching between the camera feeds between the three different trucks that were tracking it. "Looks like Miffy three has the best view. Sending you the feed now."

"Ok.... got it." Nguyen said a moment later.

"Is that...." Johannsen started. "A person?"

"If it is, it aint one of ours." Nguyen replied. *"Look at that armor. And they're flying like the damn Rocketeer."*

"Sounds like you should take the shot Corporal Johannsen." The Major cut in, though her voice sounded odd to Johannsen. Suddenly the flap to his tent opened and closes and she stepped in with him. "At you're leisure corporal."

"Yes ma'am." He said, sitting up straighter. Whether she was Army or not, he knew better than to look bad in front of an officer. His hands went to the fire controls. "First burst now." He said as he lifted up the cover and held the button down for three seconds. By the book.

Outside, at a position roughly a mile away, he heard the muffled BRRRRRRRT sound of the massive rotary cannon firing.

Even though he hated his job, Corporal Johannsen loved that sound.

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The only reason James didn't get shredded by the incoming fire was because of the glasses.

He'd spotted the camp only moments before. He'd had a moment of elation, silently pumping a fist as he flew, when he'd spotted the M.F.F.V.'s.

Everyone in the service knew about the legendary Miffy. They'd helped the U.S. gain fire superiority late in the war, allowing them to knock out enemy attack craft, incoming missiles, incoming artillery, and much more. The fact that they could also be aimed at ground targets, and

could even be used as artillery in their own right, all while being able to move at close to highway speeds, just made them even better.

They'd practically become the golden standard for how to defend any base that didn't have the luxury of setting up permanent, and costly, defensive systems.

He'd just been about to verbalize the fact that they were there. Then the zoomed in vision of the glasses had shown rapid flashes of light emitting from the ends of the Miffy's barrel.

James had known instinctively what that meant.

In only a heartbeat he'd redirected the energy keeping him in the air, to his eyes and arms.

As his left arm shot out to the side and redirected him with a blast of high pressure air, his right arm had to reach up and rip the glasses from his face. The glare from his eyes glowing with golden light had reflected off of the inside of their lenses and nearly blinded him.

As he opened them again, he saw just how close he'd come to being shredded by the ground weapon.

He watched in the slow motion that his reflex enhancing vision gave him, as a stream of lead and depleted uranium rounds that flowed like water streamed through the spot he'd been in only a split second ago.

Even with his vision the projectiles were moving so fast

Shit. He thought. *I can't outrun one of those things. They shoot down freakin' missiles.*

He turned back just in time to see a second burst of fire coming toward him. It looked like an angry black blob that seemed to grow. Then he realized that that was because it was getting closer.

No time. OLD SCHOOL!!

BOOM!

\----------

"Jesus Christ, did he just explode?" Johannsen asked as his finger hovered over the fire button. Then his eyes caught the new target beacon out of the corner of his vision. He looked at truck five's feed. "What the fuck? How's he over there now?"

"What's wrong?" The Major asked over his shoulder.

"He's a zippy little shit." Johannsen said absently.

"Can you get him?"

"Course I can get him." He said with a hint of anger. "I've shot down goddamn MAC rounds. This guy's nothing."

He hit the toggles that would engage the other trucks to fire simultaneously. Though he kept the ammo conservation engaged. This would allow up to four of the Miffy's to engage at once if they had a viable shot. He also began spinning his finger in small, tight, circles on the manual targeting pad, causing the cross-hairs to spin around the intruding flyer.

"Dodge this rocket man." He said as he hit the fire button.

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I need to gain some distance. James thought as he dodged the second volley. *I need more reaction time.*

Then as he spun to change his angle, he saw just how screwed he was.

This time there were three separate streams of rounds coming at him from three different angles. And these ones were bigger, more spread out.

Oh, what the fuck? He thought as he felt the energy hit its crescendo in his feet.

He quickly lifted his right leg at an angle and activated the spell.

BO-BOOM!

The pressure of the two opposing explosions made his knees and hips hurt. Even with the sudden change of trajectory he knew he'd only missed that attack by inches, if even that much.

Then he saw the a fourth stream that was already about to intercept him as he flew upside down.

SHIT!

He reacted by instinct. Before he even realized what he was doing his wolf hand had the mage's blade in it. His other hand reached forward with his chain in it, it was hard to tell because of how fast he was moving, but he knew that his wind magic was bringing the chain to life as it uncoiled from around him. His mouth opened, and inky blueish-black bolts of lightning began emitting from it in a cone. He felt his feet growing hot with energy.

He didn't do it with any hope of success. He knew the kind of ammo these things fired. And he had a sword, some chain, and a bit of lightning that would probably do fuck all.

He was going to die.

That didn't stop him from trying.

FUCK YOU! He thought defiantly.

The three different projectiles; oversized intercepting bullets, wind imbued chain, and death bolts, met only a fraction of a second before the Mage's blade felt the first impact.

BOOM!

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"YEAH! FUCK YOU!" Johannsen shouted triumphantly as he shot to his feet. "You dodgy little shit!"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the little light that meant there was still a moving body in the air. But his eyes remained locked on the video feed.

On it he watched as the body of the flying intruder fell from the air. He quickly swiped up on the control next to the manual aim pad and zoomed in.

He grinned as he saw the limp form tumbling, with what looked like several parts falling beside it.

His finger hovered over the fire button, temptation to "double tap" the target, like he'd been trained, itching at it. But he'd been told on day one that they were in a limited ammunition scenario here, and he'd just spent quite a bit of the valuable commodity.

Instead he watched, and waited, for the rocket-man to do something. The feed tracking them just like the cannons they were attached to, until he'd gone low enough that dunes were between him and the cannons.

Nobody could pull up from that elevation loss in time. Not after the hit they'd just taken. He was surprised there was anything left but little bits and pieces.

He pulled his hand away.

"Target down ma'am." He said with a grin.

She smiled from where she watched the feed. "Well done Corporal. Check your ammo and have your crew redistribute if necessary." She turned to leave, activating her radio as she did. "Chief Driscoll, I assume you were watching?" She asked. She paused, and Johannsen wondered why he couldn't hear the other side of the conversation if it was on the radio. Then she spoke again. "Good. Let's go see who our visitor.... was."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xvq8zf/wait_is_this_just_gate_234/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (233/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xs8u8v/wait_is_this_just_gate_232/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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He watched in the slow motion that his reflex enhancing vision gave him, as a stream of lead and depleted uranium rounds that flowed like water streamed through the spot he'd been in only a split second ago.

Even with his vision the projectiles were moving so fast

Shit. He thought. *I can't outrun one of those things. They shoot down freakin' missiles.*

He turned back just in time to see a second burst of fire coming toward him. It looked like an angry black blob that seemed to grow. Then he realized that that was because it was getting closer.

No time. OLD SCHOOL!!

BOOM!

\----------

"Jesus Christ, did he just explode?" Johannsen asked as his finger hovered over the fire button. Then his eyes caught the new target beacon out of the corner of his vision. He looked at truck five's feed. "What the fuck? How's he over there now?"

"What's wrong?" The Major asked over his shoulder.

"He's a zippy little shit." Johannsen said absently.

"Can you get him?"

"Course I can get him." He said with a hint of anger. "I've shot down goddamn MAC rounds. This guy's nothing."

He hit the toggles that would engage the other trucks to fire simultaneously. Though he kept the ammo conservation engaged. This would allow up to four of the Miffy's to engage at once if they had a viable shot. He also began spinning his finger in small, tight, circles on the manual targeting pad, causing the cross-hairs to spin around the intruding flyer.

"Dodge this rocket man." He said as he hit the fire button.

\----------

I need to gain some distance. James thought as he dodged the second volley. *I need more reaction time.*

Then as he spun to change his angle, he saw just how screwed he was.

This time there were three separate streams of rounds coming at him from three different angles. And these ones were bigger, more spread out.

Oh, what the fuck? He thought as he felt the energy hit its crescendo in his feet.

He quickly lifted his right leg at an angle and activated the spell.

BO-BOOM!

The pressure of the two opposing explosions made his knees and hips hurt. Even with the sudden change of trajectory he knew he'd only missed that attack by inches, if even that much.

Then he saw the a fourth stream that was already about to intercept him as he flew upside down.

SHIT!

He reacted by instinct. Before he even realized what he was doing his wolf hand had the mage's blade in it. His other hand reached forward with his chain in it, it was hard to tell because of how fast he was moving, but he knew that his wind magic was bringing the chain to life as it uncoiled from around him. His mouth opened, and inky blueish-black bolts of lightning began emitting from it in a cone. He felt his feet growing hot with energy.

He didn't do it with any hope of success. He knew the kind of ammo these things fired. And he had a sword, some chain, and a bit of lightning that would probably do fuck all.

He was going to die.

That didn't stop him from trying.

FUCK YOU! He thought defiantly.

The three different projectiles; oversized intercepting bullets, wind imbued chain, and death bolts, met only a fraction of a second before the Mage's blade felt the first impact.

BOOM!

\----------

"YEAH! FUCK YOU!" Johannsen shouted triumphantly as he shot to his feet. "You dodgy little shit!"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the little light that meant there was still a moving body in the air. But his eyes remained locked on the video feed.

On it he watched as the body of the flying intruder fell from the air. He quickly swiped up on the control next to the manual aim pad and zoomed in.

He grinned as he saw the limp form tumbling, with what looked like several parts falling beside it.

His finger hovered over the fire button, temptation to "double tap" the target, like he'd been trained, itching at it. But he'd been told on day one that they were in a limited ammunition scenario here, and he'd just spent quite a bit of the valuable commodity.

Instead he watched, and waited, for the rocket-man to do something. The feed tracking them just like the cannons they were attached to, until he'd gone low enough that dunes were between him and the cannons.

Nobody could pull up from that elevation loss in time. Not after the hit they'd just taken. He was surprised there was anything left but little bits and pieces.

He pulled his hand away.

"Target down ma'am." He said with a grin.

She smiled from where she watched the feed. "Well done Corporal. Check your ammo and have your crew redistribute if necessary." She turned to leave, activating her radio as she did. "Chief Driscoll, I assume you were watching?" She asked. She paused, and Johannsen wondered why he couldn't hear the other side of the conversation if it was on the radio. Then she spoke again. "Good. Let's go see who our visitor.... was."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xvq6xf/wait_is_this_just_gate_234/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (232/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xrp6dh/wait_is_this_just_gate_231/)

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She wondered if they'd put her in this room BECAUSE of its view of the shop, to taunt her.

The door rang with the knocking of a fist, likely those of the M.P. stationed outside.

"Colonel. We've been given the go ahead. Our car will be leaving in twenty minutes." The man's voice said.

"Understood." She replied, standing up as she did.

She walked over to the nearby bed and picked up the jacket of her dress uniform, inspecting it one more time before she put it on. Then she stepped into the dress shoes that completed the uniform and grabbed her hat off of the nearby chair.

"Ready." She said through the door.

It beeped with the key-card activation of its lock, then it opened onto the hallway outside. The two M.P.s escorted her out to the waiting black SUV and they drove to the hearing.

Thirty minutes later it pulled up outside of the new congressional building, it had been rebuilt after the war. She could see the Pentagon only a few blocks away.

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"He's not cut in half." Veliry attempted to assure her. "He's simply.... er..... physically dislocated from his legs." She managed to get the movement she needed and pulled the restraint off. "Get ready. He should be loose.... now. PULL!"

Margaret and the King pulled, her from his armpits, and the King from where his arm was INSIDE the bottomless entrance. Joey practically

launched out of the opening in the wall and crashed down on top of both of them.

As soon as she'd recovered she picked him up and began inspecting his waist and legs. Once she was satisfied with his... wholeness... she grabbed the lobe of his ear and wrenched back, pulling his head at a slight angle.

"Joseph Choi!" She hissed into the offending lobe. "What were you thinking?" She asked.

"Ow. Mom we were just experimenting with a new idea. It wasn't supposed to get me stuck like that." He said rapidly as he bent over to relieve the pain in his ear.

"And you!" She half yelled as she looked at Veliry, who was tempted to cower behind the King's awkwardly watching form. "How can you just have my son step into a magic hole without testing it first?"

"Um. We did test it first." Veliry said hesitantly. "We placed several items, and one test rodent, in it. They all came out the other side just fine."

"They did?" The King asked curiously. "Can you show me?"

"Of course sir." Veliry said, suddenly excited about the project again despite Mrs. Choi's anger.

"Not with my son you won't." Margaret said, reminding them of her presence as she released Joey's ear.

"Mom. It's fine." Joey cut in. "I just went through too slowly."

"No!" She scolded. "No experiments that put you at risk."

"Moooom!" He exclaimed. "I'm learning magic. Half of the lessons put me at risk." He realized the error of his statement as he was saying it.

"Then you are no longer learning magic." She said sternly as she stared him down.

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She walked up behind him and placed her hands over his for just a second before removing them, an old sign that she wanted him to listen for a moment. He lifted his hands from his ears just a tiny bit.

"You came up with all this mijo?" She asked. "These were your ideas?"

He didn't speak, simply nodding his head up and down once.

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"I don't know what that is." Veliry admitted. "But I think I understand the concept. We..." She nodded to Joey. "Will be more careful in the future."

In a display that she'd grown used to from previous arguments with her son, Joey spun around quickly and hugged her.

"Thank you mom." He said into her ear.

And as quickly as that he'd released her back onto the ground and began explaining the concept of the openings to both her and the King.

She sighed, marveling at how unpredictable BOTH of her sons could be now.

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Don't hurt my boy. She thought to herself as she absently listened to Joey's explanation, his face only showing excitement and none of the former upset it had had only moments before.

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Oh god. Why do I feel so tired? He thought as he opened his eyes. *I just woke up. I shouldn't feel like this.*

As he slowly brought everything into focus he looked around. The room looked familiar, and yet not quite right.

Is this a hospital? Why am I in a hospital?

But that wasn't quite right either. The bed and all the white fixtures around him were right. That was hospital style. But the ceiling above him looked like it was made of grey stone. And the furniture itself looked like some kind of old school wooden stuff from a farm or something.

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Batista looked up and was shocked to see someone with what looked like deer antlers sprouting from their head.

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"Mister Batista!" They yelled as they rushed forward. ^("Mister Batista! It's going to be alr-")

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xuych6/wait_is_this_just_gate_233/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (232/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xrp46o/wait_is_this_just_gate_231/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (231/?)

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Writer's note: I know I'm late. Stuff occurred IRL.

AND NO THE LAST SECTION IS NOT LEADING TO WHAT YOU THINK.... NO NOT THAT EITHER. GET YOUR MINDS OUT OF THE GUTTER.

Enjoy.

\~

James enjoyed his new method of flight.

He'd spent the first hour or so of it whooping and hollering as he soared through the air like a superhero. He'd even done a flyby to mess with a Clan Drakrid Wyrm rider that he thought he actually might have recognized. Though he flew past far too quickly to be certain. He'd looked back and laughed a bit as the rider had almost fallen off of their mount in surprise, then proceeded to curse him with a raised fist.

This had all entertained him as he'd moved. But now he'd been flying for nearly six hours and the novelty had worn off.

Now it was just work.

Keeping the mixture of ideas flowing in his head in a manner that could maintain the burning jets that powered him was difficult. More than a few times he'd felt the power wane, especially if he flew too high where it became difficult to gather energy from the ground below.

He also noticed that flying over the city, and later the small towns, was much easier. He knew that people were a source of magical energy too. But it was magical TABOO to gather from them without consent, and James had no intention of going against that.

What he hadn't thought of, though it made sense in retrospect, was that the ACTIVITIES people took part in ALSO generated magical energy. Some were obvious; the heat of a smith's forge, or the flow of water through a mill. Others were more esoteric. He sensed an energy that made him feel warm inside coming from a seamstress's hut. He felt rage and pain, and also a startlingly strong pride as he flew over a small training area for a small army garrison. He felt a foul, malignant, sapping, energy as he flew over a graveyard. It made him wonder if some of those graves had been warded against magical energy like Kela's entombment statue had. But he also sensed darkness and a mixture of negative emotions there that he had, unfortunately, become all too familiar with within himself. He avoided drawing on that energy entirely.

In short, he felt all the energies that seemed to mark an area as being very heavily infused with human life. Good and bad.

He wished he still had the energy sensing monocle Veliry had let him, and Joey use the day before. He wanted to look down and study the flow of magical energy around him and see if it could help him understand his own abilities as well. But unfortunately, he'd left it in his little brother's possession absentmindedly, and he had yet to figure out the vision magic that allowed him to get the same effect without it.

Regardless, he flew until the sky darkened and the wind, already frigid at this altitude, began to chill even further. He only continued long enough to get to the small village that he'd seen in the distance. He landed a mile or so away and walked toward the town. Winter was all but gone now, even the trees were beginning to green again, but the chill of night still made him glad that he HAD packed his winter gear. Still, he longed for the warmth of his drake companion Steve.

"One day down." He said as he neared the town, pulling his hood up as he did. "Couple more to go."

He meandered toward the noise of the town's tavern.

\----------

Amina, Vickers, and several of the royal guard griffin riders including Guardian Ira'Nyl, flew in formation to the southeast, following James's direction.

Below her her griffin held a set of straps that led down to a large head with a leather sack around its neck.

Steve grumbled in mild distress as they flew.

"I know boy." She said, half yelling, down to the drake.

She still didn't understand what kind of mind James's little brother had to come up with the idea. She was also amazed that Steve had allowed it as much as he had. He'd still struggled and resisted, but he hadn't hurt anyone, and had actually seemed hesitant to even resist when it came to Joey.

She wondered if the drake knew that Joey was the sibling of his rider. The visual similarity was obvious enough to a person, but she didn't know if that mattered to a forty-foot-tall lizard. Maybe it was his scent.

Regardless, the drake was now almost entirely inside of a custom-made bottomless bag, with only his head sticking out.

She had no idea how James would react to the idea. Mostly she was just glad that the drake hadn't opted to use his fire breath yet. If he did it would cause more than a few problems, and maybe even the drakes own death.

The idea had her more than a little stressed. So, she'd opted to focus on the task of flying.

Right behind you dear. She thought, ignoring the groan from below. *And we brought a friend.*

\----------

"Alright First Sergeant." Sergeant Juliuss said nonchalantly. "Miffy's are set up. Anything attempts to come within three miles of us had better be underground when it does. Otherwise, it's getting turned into ground beef."

"Good job Sergeant." Nguyen replied. "How are they on ammo?"

Julius pulled up his tablet and looked at the manifests for each rig. "They're all rockin' eight-k in rounds. And the central truck has a full hundred of its arty rounds in case anything big comes a knockin."

"Good. I'll inform the Major. You and your crew get some rest. By tomorrow I want a draft of a schedule for you guys to rotate on checks for them okay."

Julius nodded. "Got it boss."

"Go get some chow." Nguyen said to dismiss the sergeant. He watched him go for a moment. He was uneasy about the new additions to their roster, but he couldn't deny that having the new M.F.F.V.'s was a reassuring thing.

He grimaced a bit as he saw Sgt. Julius fist bump one of Driscoll's men as he passed.

He opted to ignore it. Driscoll and the other Muck Marchers were well outside of his control. In fact, he doubted whether they'd even answer to the Major.

Speaking of the Major, he still needed to go give her an update.

As he walked to the new command tent, he looked around and noted the changes to the camp.

The original Petravian style tents, what few were left after the battle, were still around. Many of them were patched and resewn where they'd been damaged, but they were still in use. Only, unlike before, now they were mostly being used as storage for the gear from the dead soldiers and dwarves, or else as simple shade tents.

The tents they were using for actual operational purposes were all Earth Military standard InflatCrete tents with hydration seals. Though, most of those seals weren't being used at the moment. What need was there when they had a magical source of (seemingly) infinite water?

The Command tent had its seal engaged though, he noticed.

The tents weren't the only change though. An area in the center of the camp had been cleared and sprayed with layers of foam hardener. Over the course of a day, it had been transformed from a blank patch of sand to a fully functioning helipad. While it currently sat empty, save a few crates, it told Nguyen what the Major and the people on Earth had planned for them.

He also didn't like that the Muck Marchers had had a small armory sent over, complete with two people who claimed to be their armorers, while also looking like mad scientists from some cheesy b-grade film.

He opened the flap to the command tent, making sure he disengaged and reengaged the hydration seal as quickly as he could as he stepped in.

"First Sergeant." The Major greeted without looking at him.

"Ma'am." He returned. "The M.F.F.V.s are stationed according to the plan Chief Driscoll's plan, with a slight change on one position due to some unexpectedly loose sand."

"And their ammo?" She asked.

"Evenly distributed." He confirmed.

"Good." She gestured to the table at the back. "Casualties have finished being processed."

He nodded. He'd actually been surprised when the Major had taken that duty upon herself. He couldn't see an ulterior motive for why, but he suspected there was one.

"Glad to hear." He said. "Looks like that landing pad is done."

"Yes." She said. "We'll be getting the first parts of the new recon helicopter in a few days. It should help us get an eye on the region around us."

"Ah. Very good." Nguyen said, unsure of where to go with the conversation. He didn't know why he always felt so awkward talking to the Major. He knew that at least part of it was his lack of trust in her.

As if reading his thoughts, she spoke up.

"You don't trust me, do you?" She asked. Nguyen flinched from the unexpectedly insightful words. He couldn't help but notice the sudden stillness and silence of the other people in the tent. "Or Driscoll and his people?" She added.

Nguyen thought for a moment, biting his lip as he did.

Then he turned back to her.

"No." He said, standing up straighter as he did. "No, I don't."

She looked at him and he got the sense that it was the first time she'd really LOOKED at him. This despite the fact that she'd given him a rather rough inspection almost as soon as they'd met.

"May I ask why?"

He looked around at the other people. They made a point of not meeting his gaze when he did.

"Because this was originally meant to be a recon mission." He said. "We were supposed to stay low, quiet, and unseen. Make contact with home. Help them figure out a way back while also gathering intel on this world and how it works." He gestured toward the door to the tent. "And now we've got M.F.F.V.'s, Artillery, a helipad, and some goddam Muck Marchers. You've got this camp set up like we're about to wage war on these people."

He looked around again. He saw a couple people who looked like they might have been in agreement with him, but none of them spoke up or anything. He hadn't expected them to.

"What are we doing here ma'am?" He asked finally.

She stared at him for a few moments before speaking.

"We're following our orders." She said simply. "YOU.... had the mission of recon, and staying low, quiet, and unseen... as you called it." She shook her head. "You fucked it up. It's over. Now we do things the other way. We've already dispatched an entire platoon of local soldiers and some kind of Miner.... clan... thing." She tilted her head for a moment. "Low and quiet is off the table now. Odds are that there are already Petravian reinforcements coming. When they arrive, we'll greet them with an olive branch. And if that olive branch isn't accepted then we'll greet them with iron and lead."

"And what will that accomplish?" He asked, becoming aggravated. "That'll just make them give us their FULL attention."

"Probably." She admitted before sipping from a cup of tea.

"Pro-... Probably?" He wondered, a look of disbelief on his face. "Probably? You say that as if it's okay. Like you WANT to get in a fight."

She scoffed as she put the tea back down. "Of course not." She said. "What SANE soldier has ever WANTED a fight with a bunch of random people they don't know?" She said as if having a simple conversation. "But I AM an infantry commander." She said, pointing at the rifle on the shoulder of her uniform. "They sent ME here for a reason. And it wasn't to show the locals how to make friendship bracelets."

He didn't have an answer to that. He knew she was infantry. Had known since he'd first met her. And he knew better than to think that the General's or anyone at that level would send her over WITHOUT taking that into account. Once again, she spoke up as if reading his mind.

"Disagreeing with me is fine First Sergeant Nguyen." She said, interrupting his thoughts. "If anything, it's a good thing. That's simplified checks and balances in a military unit."

He waited for her to continue. But before she did, she turned and glared at him.

"But from now on." She said, much more sternly now. She glanced at the other people around the room. "I expect it to occur BEHIND.... closed.... doors." He was about to answer when she continued. "And when I give orders. I expect them to be obeyed. Any disagreements can be brought up in the same manner. Understood?"

He took a deep breath.

"Yes ma'am." He said simply.

"Good." She said, lightening her tone and facial expressions. "Now tell me how our people's morale is doing. I know they lost a lot of good people."

\------------------------

"Are you lost Madame Choi?" The King's voice boomed softly as Margaret walked hesitantly through the castle grounds, causing her to jump slightly.

"Oh. King Farrick." She said with a slight laugh as she recovered from the surprise. "I suppose I am. I'm trying to find where um... Arch Mage Veliry's... lab?... is." She said uncertainly. "He's been taking lessons from her for the past week or so. With James gone on his um... recon thing... I don't really have anyone else to talk to."

The king looked at her curiously and with a touch of sympathy. Then he held out his arm, brushing off the aide who had been attempting to hand him a sheet of paper of some kind as he did.

"Allow me." He said. "I can understand the notion feeling alone despite being in a castle full of people." He admitted. "Besides, I can show you some of the castle's history AND get an update on the Arch Mage's progress on certain.... projects."

She looked at the arm uncertainly for a moment before accepting it. She didn't know whether or not it was considered rude to decline a King's invitation.

"For the record." He said, after they'd walked in awkward silence for a few moments. "I have instructed all the staff here to treat you with all the respect and grace that they would show to any allied foreign dignitary. If you are ever in need of information, or even just wish to speak to someone, they are all available to you."

"That's.... very kind of you, your majesty." She said with a smile. "And they have been very kind to both myself, and my youngest son."

"I am glad to hear it." He said with a warm smile. "And please, call me Farrick. We're to be in-laws soon enough. We might as well be on even terms."

"I'll... try." She admitted. "Though I must admit that speaking with royalty is still... new... to me. I might slip."

"Trying is all I ever ask." He said, then he gestured at a statue of two people holding hands awkwardly, one significantly taller than the other to the point of absurdity. "One of my wife's ancestors." He said as they continued. "A giant Chieftan who won her ancient matron's hand in marriage after a brutal round of single combat with their husband." He smiled. "It is also why my children are so much taller than I am."

"That poor woman." Margaret said in a whisper. "Your daughter Amina isn't so tall." She said to him. "I mean, she is tall. But not anything I would consider abnormal."

"No." He agreed. "She's fairly human in stature. But you haven't met her youngest sister yet, and likely won't any time soon. Nor have you met the crown prince yet. Though, you will at the wedding." He held his other hand well above his head to indicate height. "Close to eight feet, that one."

"Really?" She said in surprise.

"Oh yes. And not lean either. Built as proportionally as any human soldier you'll ever meet. Just giant sized... or rather... half giant sized."

"Is your wife the same way?" She asked curiously. "I haven't met her either."

The King's face flashed a look of weariness for just a moment.

"And sadly, you never shall." He said with a weak smile. "She passed some fifteen years ago. But no. She was of an average height. Amina's height even."

"I'm sorry." Margaret apologized. "I didn't know."

"No need to apologize Mrs. Choi. It's not as if it's your fault." He pointed out a stained-glass window showing a dark-haired man emerging from a circle of flames with a sword in one hand and a book in the other. "That one is my ancestor. He was also a summoned hero, much like your son James."

"Really? So you're not... fully... native to this world?" She asked.

"Well. It was several thousand years ago. So I might as well be. But technically no." He said wistfully.

"I wonder what kind of world they were from." She wondered. "Maybe it was Earth."

"The possibility has been raised by the mages." He admitted. He pointed to a door that looked odd to her. "We're here."

"Thank you." She said as she detached from his arm. She was about to take a step forward, but his arm clamped onto her shoulder while her foot was still in the air.

"Wait." He said sternly.

She was about to turn and ask what was wrong, then she felt something sharp prick her neck just below her chin. She froze in surprise.

"Door." He said in a commanding voice. "Stand down. This is Captain Choi's mother. She is to remain unharmed.

"Apologies King Farrick." Said an odd voice that Margaret thought might have been coming from the door itself.

She looked back at it and that was when she saw what had pricked her neck. It was a long needle, so thin that she hadn't even noticed it until she'd felt its sting. It quickly retreated back into the door's wooden frame. As soon as it did it seemed to disappear, as though it was simply a part of the door.

"What the hell?" She asked.

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His hand moved forward to her neck, two fingers extended like they were pointing, and she saw a soft amber glow. The slight sting that she'd begun to feel faded to nothing. She touched it again and her hand came away with no blood.

She looked at the door and saw that it had now sprouted several eyes and mouths all over its dark wooden frame. She resisted the urge to recoil in disgust.

"Open." He commanded. The door made a movement that she thought might have been its equivalent of wincing, though it was hard to tell.

"Yes your majesty." It said before seeming to melt into the edges of its frame.

The sight behind it caused her face to flush with rage.

"JOSEPH CHOI!" She yelled. "WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING!?!?"

Joey jumped at the sound of her voice.

"Mom?!?" He yelled as he spun to face her. "It's not what it looks like!"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xs8w8e/wait_is_this_just_gate_232/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (231/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xqljwo/wait_is_this_just_gate_230/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I know I'm late. Stuff occurred IRL.

AND NO THE LAST SECTION IS NOT LEADING TO WHAT YOU THINK.... NO NOT THAT EITHER. GET YOUR MINDS OUT OF THE GUTTER.

Enjoy.

\~

James enjoyed his new method of flight.

He'd spent the first hour or so of it whooping and hollering as he soared through the air like a superhero. He'd even done a flyby to mess with a Clan Drakrid Wyrm rider that he thought he actually might have recognized. Though he flew past far too quickly to be certain. He'd looked back and laughed a bit as the rider had almost fallen off of their mount in surprise, then proceeded to curse him with a raised fist.

This had all entertained him as he'd moved. But now he'd been flying for nearly six hours and the novelty had worn off.

Now it was just work.

Keeping the mixture of ideas flowing in his head in a manner that could maintain the burning jets that powered him was difficult. More than a few times he'd felt the power wane, especially if he flew too high where it became difficult to gather energy from the ground below.

He also noticed that flying over the city, and later the small towns, was much easier. He knew that people were a source of magical energy too. But it was magical TABOO to gather from them without consent, and James had no intention of going against that.

What he hadn't thought of, though it made sense in retrospect, was that the ACTIVITIES people took part in ALSO generated magical energy. Some were obvious; the heat of a smith's forge, or the flow of water through a mill. Others were more esoteric. He sensed an energy that made him feel warm inside coming from a seamstress's hut. He felt rage and pain, and also a startlingly strong pride as he flew over a small training area for a small army garrison. He felt a foul, malignant, sapping, energy as he flew over a graveyard. It made him wonder if some of those graves had been warded against magical energy like Kela's entombment statue had. But he also sensed darkness and a mixture of negative emotions there that he had, unfortunately, become all too familiar with within himself. He avoided drawing on that energy entirely.

In short, he felt all the energies that seemed to mark an area as being very heavily infused with human life. Good and bad.

He wished he still had the energy sensing monocle Veliry had let him, and Joey use the day before. He wanted to look down and study the flow of magical energy around him and see if it could help him understand his own abilities as well. But unfortunately, he'd left it in his little brother's possession absentmindedly, and he had yet to figure out the vision magic that allowed him to get the same effect without it.

Regardless, he flew until the sky darkened and the wind, already frigid at this altitude, began to chill even further. He only continued long enough to get to the small village that he'd seen in the distance. He landed a mile or so away and walked toward the town. Winter was all but gone now, even the trees were beginning to green again, but the chill of night still made him glad that he HAD packed his winter gear. Still, he longed for the warmth of his drake companion Steve.

"One day down." He said as he neared the town, pulling his hood up as he did. "Couple more to go."

He meandered toward the noise of the town's tavern.

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Amina, Vickers, and several of the royal guard griffin riders including Guardian Ira'Nyl, flew in formation to the southeast, following James's direction.

Below her her griffin held a set of straps that led down to a large head with a leather sack around its neck.

Steve grumbled in mild distress as they flew.

"I know boy." She said, half yelling, down to the drake.

She still didn't understand what kind of mind James's little brother had to come up with the idea. She was also amazed that Steve had allowed it as much as he had. He'd still struggled and resisted, but he hadn't hurt anyone, and had actually seemed hesitant to even resist when it came to Joey.

She wondered if the drake knew that Joey was the sibling of his rider. The visual similarity was obvious enough to a person, but she didn't know if that mattered to a forty-foot-tall lizard. Maybe it was his scent.

Regardless, the drake was now almost entirely inside of a custom-made bottomless bag, with only his head sticking out.

She had no idea how James would react to the idea. Mostly she was just glad that the drake hadn't opted to use his fire breath yet. If he did it would cause more than a few problems, and maybe even the drakes own death.

The idea had her more than a little stressed. So, she'd opted to focus on the task of flying.

Right behind you dear. She thought, ignoring the groan from below. *And we brought a friend.*

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"Alright First Sergeant." Sergeant Juliuss said nonchalantly. "Miffy's are set up. Anything attempts to come within three miles of us had better be underground when it does. Otherwise, it's getting turned into ground beef."

"Good job Sergeant." Nguyen replied. "How are they on ammo?"

Julius pulled up his tablet and looked at the manifests for each rig. "They're all rockin' eight-k in rounds. And the central truck has a full hundred of its arty rounds in case anything big comes a knockin."

"Good. I'll inform the Major. You and your crew get some rest. By tomorrow I want a draft of a schedule for you guys to rotate on checks for them okay."

Julius nodded. "Got it boss."

"Go get some chow." Nguyen said to dismiss the sergeant. He watched him go for a moment. He was uneasy about the new additions to their roster, but he couldn't deny that having the new M.F.F.V.'s was a reassuring thing.

He grimaced a bit as he saw Sgt. Julius fist bump one of Driscoll's men as he passed.

He opted to ignore it. Driscoll and the other Muck Marchers were well outside of his control. In fact, he doubted whether they'd even answer to the Major.

Speaking of the Major, he still needed to go give her an update.

As he walked to the new command tent, he looked around and noted the changes to the camp.

The original Petravian style tents, what few were left after the battle, were still around. Many of them were patched and resewn where they'd been damaged, but they were still in use. Only, unlike before, now they were mostly being used as storage for the gear from the dead soldiers and dwarves, or else as simple shade tents.

The tents they were using for actual operational purposes were all Earth Military standard InflatCrete tents with hydration seals. Though, most of those seals weren't being used at the moment. What need was there when they had a magical source of (seemingly) infinite water?

The Command tent had its seal engaged though, he noticed.

The tents weren't the only change though. An area in the center of the camp had been cleared and sprayed with layers of foam hardener. Over the course of a day, it had been transformed from a blank patch of sand to a fully functioning helipad. While it currently sat empty, save a few crates, it told Nguyen what the Major and the people on Earth had planned for them.

He also didn't like that the Muck Marchers had had a small armory sent over, complete with two people who claimed to be their armorers, while also looking like mad scientists from some cheesy b-grade film.

He opened the flap to the command tent, making sure he disengaged and reengaged the hydration seal as quickly as he could as he stepped in.

"First Sergeant." The Major greeted without looking at him.

"Ma'am." He returned. "The M.F.F.V.s are stationed according to the plan Chief Driscoll's plan, with a slight change on one position due to some unexpectedly loose sand."

"And their ammo?" She asked.

"Evenly distributed." He confirmed.

"Good." She gestured to the table at the back. "Casualties have finished being processed."

He nodded. He'd actually been surprised when the Major had taken that duty upon herself. He couldn't see an ulterior motive for why, but he suspected there was one.

"Glad to hear." He said. "Looks like that landing pad is done."

"Yes." She said. "We'll be getting the first parts of the new recon helicopter in a few days. It should help us get an eye on the region around us."

"Ah. Very good." Nguyen said, unsure of where to go with the conversation. He didn't know why he always felt so awkward talking to the Major. He knew that at least part of it was his lack of trust in her.

As if reading his thoughts, she spoke up.

"You don't trust me, do you?" She asked. Nguyen flinched from the unexpectedly insightful words. He couldn't help but notice the sudden stillness and silence of the other people in the tent. "Or Driscoll and his people?" She added.

Nguyen thought for a moment, biting his lip as he did.

Then he turned back to her.

"No." He said, standing up straighter as he did. "No, I don't."

She looked at him and he got the sense that it was the first time she'd really LOOKED at him. This despite the fact that she'd given him a rather rough inspection almost as soon as they'd met.

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"What are we doing here ma'am?" He asked finally.

She stared at him for a few moments before speaking.

"We're following our orders." She said simply. "YOU.... had the mission of recon, and staying low, quiet, and unseen... as you called it." She shook her head. "You fucked it up. It's over. Now we do things the other way. We've already dispatched an entire platoon of local soldiers and some kind of Miner.... clan... thing." She tilted her head for a moment. "Low and quiet is off the table now. Odds are that there are already Petravian reinforcements coming. When they arrive, we'll greet them with an olive branch. And if that olive branch isn't accepted then we'll greet them with iron and lead."

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He didn't have an answer to that. He knew she was infantry. Had known since he'd first met her. And he knew better than to think that the General's or anyone at that level would send her over WITHOUT taking that into account. Once again, she spoke up as if reading his mind.

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"Are you lost Madame Choi?" The King's voice boomed softly as Margaret walked hesitantly through the castle grounds, causing her to jump slightly.

"Oh. King Farrick." She said with a slight laugh as she recovered from the surprise. "I suppose I am. I'm trying to find where um... Arch Mage Veliry's... lab?... is." She said uncertainly. "He's been taking lessons from her for the past week or so. With James gone on his um... recon thing... I don't really have anyone else to talk to."

The king looked at her curiously and with a touch of sympathy. Then he held out his arm, brushing off the aide who had been attempting to hand him a sheet of paper of some kind as he did.

"Allow me." He said. "I can understand the notion feeling alone despite being in a castle full of people." He admitted. "Besides, I can show you some of the castle's history AND get an update on the Arch Mage's progress on certain.... projects."

She looked at the arm uncertainly for a moment before accepting it. She didn't know whether or not it was considered rude to decline a King's invitation.

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"That's.... very kind of you, your majesty." She said with a smile. "And they have been very kind to both myself, and my youngest son."

"I am glad to hear it." He said with a warm smile. "And please, call me Farrick. We're to be in-laws soon enough. We might as well be on even terms."

"I'll... try." She admitted. "Though I must admit that speaking with royalty is still... new... to me. I might slip."

"Trying is all I ever ask." He said, then he gestured at a statue of two people holding hands awkwardly, one significantly taller than the other to the point of absurdity. "One of my wife's ancestors." He said as they continued. "A giant Chieftan who won her ancient matron's hand in marriage after a brutal round of single combat with their husband." He smiled. "It is also why my children are so much taller than I am."

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"Oh yes. And not lean either. Built as proportionally as any human soldier you'll ever meet. Just giant sized... or rather... half giant sized."

"Is your wife the same way?" She asked curiously. "I haven't met her either."

The King's face flashed a look of weariness for just a moment.

"And sadly, you never shall." He said with a weak smile. "She passed some fifteen years ago. But no. She was of an average height. Amina's height even."

"I'm sorry." Margaret apologized. "I didn't know."

"No need to apologize Mrs. Choi. It's not as if it's your fault." He pointed out a stained-glass window showing a dark-haired man emerging from a circle of flames with a sword in one hand and a book in the other. "That one is my ancestor. He was also a summoned hero, much like your son James."

"Really? So you're not... fully... native to this world?" She asked.

"Well. It was several thousand years ago. So I might as well be. But technically no." He said wistfully.

"I wonder what kind of world they were from." She wondered. "Maybe it was Earth."

"The possibility has been raised by the mages." He admitted. He pointed to a door that looked odd to her. "We're here."

"Thank you." She said as she detached from his arm. She was about to take a step forward, but his arm clamped onto her shoulder while her foot was still in the air.

"Wait." He said sternly.

She was about to turn and ask what was wrong, then she felt something sharp prick her neck just below her chin. She froze in surprise.

"Door." He said in a commanding voice. "Stand down. This is Captain Choi's mother. She is to remain unharmed.

"Apologies King Farrick." Said an odd voice that Margaret thought might have been coming from the door itself.

She looked back at it and that was when she saw what had pricked her neck. It was a long needle, so thin that she hadn't even noticed it until she'd felt its sting. It quickly retreated back into the door's wooden frame. As soon as it did it seemed to disappear, as though it was simply a part of the door.

"What the hell?" She asked.

He placed a hand on her shoulder. "My apologies Mrs. Choi. I should have warned you. This is a magical door designed to protect the room it guards. It requires its owner's permission." He pointed an angry glare at the door. "OR THAT OF THE KING OF THE CASTLE IT IS A PART OF." He said scoldingly. "Before it will open."

His hand moved forward to her neck, two fingers extended like they were pointing, and she saw a soft amber glow. The slight sting that she'd begun to feel faded to nothing. She touched it again and her hand came away with no blood.

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"Open." He commanded. The door made a movement that she thought might have been its equivalent of wincing, though it was hard to tell.

"Yes your majesty." It said before seeming to melt into the edges of its frame.

The sight behind it caused her face to flush with rage.

"JOSEPH CHOI!" She yelled. "WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING!?!?"

Joey jumped at the sound of her voice.

"Mom?!?" He yelled as he spun to face her. "It's not what it looks like!"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xs8u8v/wait_is_this_just_gate_232/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (230/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xps7wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_229/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Progress. Love that stuff.

Also the last section will not be expanded on in any way shape or form. If you want more info on that story, feel free to write it yourself in [r/GATEhouse](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/)

\~

"Hey.... Miss Veliry?" Joey asked as he sat reading the various notes and documents on the cluttered desk in the Arch Mage's lab. She was tinkering with the feed mechanism on one of her rifle prototypes, a pair of magnifying glasses slotted over her face and so didn't notice the call. "Miss Veliry?" Joey repeated louder.

"Hmmm?" She asked as she finally got the lever she'd been fiddling with loose enough to move.

"Are you busy?" He asked. "I had a question about the bottomless bags."

"Yes and no." She answered as she finally pried the piece of metal out with a smile. "Why? And why bottomless bags?"

"It's just.... how do they work?" He asked. "And also, I've seen warnings never to use one that's damaged, and to NEVER put one inside another. I think I understand why. But would you mind clarifying?"

"Well..." She began as she replaced the lever with a smaller, differently shaped one. "Damaged bags, if they fail, can violently expel their contents. That's not so-Ow!" She winced as the mechanism in the rifle pinched her finger. "That's not so bad if its just full of normal items. Coins, food, clothes, things like that. Just an inconvenience if THAT happens. But if you have delicate items. Or if you're a mage or something, like me, and carry things that are slightly more.... volatile... than it can actually be dangerous." She paused as she thought for a second. "Or if you're a traveling armorer with a bag full of sharp things." She added with a tilt of her head.

"That makes sense." Joey responded. "And it's pretty much what I expected. But what about putting a bag inside another bag?"

Veliry smiled a little as the lever finally slotted into its place correctly, she quickly set the restraining pin in place to keep it from moving and then grabbed the small gear rod that would go on top of it.

"That's..... more complicated." She said as she set the rifle down and turned to look at him. Joey smiled for a moment before turning away to

look at the notes again, though he kept her in his peripheral vision. "In a controlled setting, with a knowledgeable mage, it can be used to add space to the external bag." She thought for a moment. "Kind of like.... adding a set of walls to the inside of a large house to make a room inside of it. Only you can remove the room as needed to get what's within it." She scrunched her face a bit as she tried to think of a better way to say it.

"Or like adding a folder INTO another folder on your tablet." He said, pointing at the tablet propped up on the table beside him.

She thought about it, then smiled. "That's a much better analogy." She agreed.

Joey thought for a moment. "And if it's not done correctly?"

She grimaced. "Well. In that situation the two sub-dimensions end up merging. Often violently. The contents end up overlapping and fusing on an alchemical level. And with wildly unpredictable results. If the bags are empty it tends to just destroy the two bags. But if they're full... Even a little bit." She grimaced again. "And it usually results in an explosion."

"Huh." He said. "I thought it was going to be D&D style and open a planar vortex."

"What?" She asked, in confusion.

"Nothing." He said. "Just... Earth stuff." He held up a pouch from the table. "How big can they get?"

"Bottomless bags?" She asked. Joey nodded. Veliry shrugged. "As big as the bag you make them of, I suppose. It's a simple conversion process once you know how to do it, if a bit energy intensive."

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"Sweet." Vickers said. "Make sure not to turn those on until you've got that stuff on it."

"I know." James said. Amina cinched one of his armor pieces in place.

"Got your winter gear?" She asked. "Depending on how high you go and where you land to spot them, it might be cold."

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James ignored the barb as he planted a kiss on Amina's cheek. "Southeast right?" He asked her softly. She nodded. James nodded too. "Big ass desert in the middle of a bunch of mountains. Easy."

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"THAT WAY YOU DUMB SHIT!" Vickers yelled while pointing southeast.

James wavered before taking off in the indicated direction.

Amina chuckled at the interaction.

"You're laughing?" He asked incredulously.

She calmed herself for a moment before responding. "He knew which way it was." She said. "He was just messing with you.... again."

Vickers ground his teeth again as he looked up at the rapidly moving shape of the departing captain.

"I fucking hate that guy." He said to himself.

"He knows." She said as she began walking toward the stables. "Now come on. We've got to get moving too."

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"Joey?" She asked in surprise.

"Amina!" He said with a smile. Then he turned and saw Vickers "And Chief Vickers. You're taking off to follow James right? That's what that noise was? Him taking off?"

"Yeah." Vickers answered, his former anger dissolved by the unexpected arrival of the young man.

"Okay." Joey said. "Me and Arch Mage Veliry came up with something about the blight." He said excitedly. The both looked shocked at the announcement. "But that can wait. That idea also gave me ANOTHER idea about how you can help James." He looked over at the stables with a look of unease.

"What is it?" Amina asked curiously.

Joey kept peering at the stables uncertainly.

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In fact, Link was such a good dog that Mike rarely, if ever, used a leash for him. He always kept the leash with him, in case another dog came around. But he rarely needed it. The little Terrier-Beagle mix was well behaved and always listened.

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Normally Mike would be fine letting the dog chase and bark at the rodents futilely. After all, Link had never caught one before. He was too short, too slow, and couldn't get up the trees that were all around the area. He was pretty sure the squirrels taunted the dog on purpose.

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Link froze where he was, startled by the sudden noise and violence that had occurred around him.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xrp6dh/wait_is_this_just_gate_231/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (230/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xps67e/wait_is_this_just_gate_229/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Progress. Love that stuff.

Also the last section will not be expanded on in any way shape or form. If you want more info on that story, feel free to write it yourself in r/GATEhouse

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"Hey.... Miss Veliry?" Joey asked as he sat reading the various notes and documents on the cluttered desk in the Arch Mage's lab. She was tinkering with the feed mechanism on one of her rifle prototypes, a pair of magnifying glasses slotted over her face and so didn't notice the call. "Miss Veliry?" Joey repeated louder.

"Hmmm?" She asked as she finally got the lever she'd been fiddling with loose enough to move.

"Are you busy?" He asked. "I had a question about the bottomless bags."

"Yes and no." She answered as she finally pried the piece of metal out with a smile. "Why? And why bottomless bags?"

"It's just.... how do they work?" He asked. "And also, I've seen warnings never to use one that's damaged, and to NEVER put one inside another. I think I understand why. But would you mind clarifying?"

"Well..." She began as she replaced the lever with a smaller, differently shaped one. "Damaged bags, if they fail, can violently expel their contents. That's not so-Ow!" She winced as the mechanism in the rifle pinched her finger. "That's not so bad if its just full of normal items. Coins, food, clothes, things like that. Just an inconvenience if THAT happens. But if you have delicate items. Or if you're a mage or something, like me, and carry things that are slightly more.... volatile... than it can actually be dangerous." She paused as she thought for a second. "Or if you're a traveling armorer with a bag full of sharp things." She added with a tilt of her head.

"That makes sense." Joey responded. "And it's pretty much what I expected. But what about putting a bag inside another bag?"

Veliry smiled a little as the lever finally slotted into its place correctly, she quickly set the restraining pin in place to keep it from moving and then grabbed the small gear rod that would go on top of it.

"That's..... more complicated." She said as she set the rifle down and turned to look at him. Joey smiled for a moment before turning away to look at the notes again, though he kept her in his peripheral vision. "In a controlled setting, with a knowledgeable mage, it can be used to add space to the external bag." She thought for a moment. "Kind of like.... adding a set of walls to the inside of a large house to make a room inside of it. Only you can remove the room as needed to get what's within it." She scrunched her face a bit as she tried to think of a better way to say it.

"Or like adding a folder INTO another folder on your tablet." He said, pointing at the tablet propped up on the table beside him.

She thought about it, then smiled. "That's a much better analogy." She agreed.

Joey thought for a moment. "And if it's not done correctly?"

She grimaced. "Well. In that situation the two sub-dimensions end up merging. Often violently. The contents end up overlapping and fusing on an alchemical level. And with wildly unpredictable results. If the bags are empty it tends to just destroy the two bags. But if they're full... Even a little bit." She grimaced again. "And it usually results in an explosion."

"Huh." He said. "I thought it was going to be D&D style and open a planar vortex."

"What?" She asked, in confusion.

"Nothing." He said. "Just... Earth stuff." He held up a pouch from the table. "How big can they get?"

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xrp46o/wait_is_this_just_gate_231/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (229/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xg3e69/wait_is_this_just_gate_228/)

Writer's note: Yeah I'm still alive. I told y'all I was gonna be on vacation for a week. Bit of a short and sweet one. Still a bit jet lagged.

EEEEENNNNNNNJJJJJOOOOOOYYYYYYY!!!!!!

\~

BOOM!

"Okay." James said as he peered through the little orange-ish brown monocle Veliry had given him. "Good height..... Oh. I see what you mean about the energy flow. God that's weird."

Boom! BoomBoomboom....

"This is much harder than you make it look!" Veliry yelled back as she stabilized herself in mid air.

pop-po-po-pop! fsssssSSSSSSSHHHHHH!!!

"Ohhhhh yeah! That's it!" James exclaimed. "Hold that. That's the jet." He instructed as he watched the magical energy flowing through the mage's legs harmonize and eventually become a smaller, but steadier tempo.

Instead of a series of small stabilizing explosion, the magical emanations from Veliry's feet had become nearly identical to the thrusters of a fighter jet. Though much smaller.

"Ramp it up!" Joey yelled excitedly from beside him as he watched the experiment.

"Gre-" Veliry began before wavering in the air.

"Use your hands to stabilize!" James directed.

Boom! An explosion emanated from the hand closest to the ground, sending her back up straight.

"Oh gods!" She said as she straightened back up. "HOW DO YOU DO THIS IN A FIGHT?!?!"

"Well!" James began sarcastically. "I do spend a lot of time at the healers! Remember?"

A few moments, and a few more explosions, later and Veliry was flying with fairly good stability.

James handed the monocle to Joey.

"Here bud. Watch the energy. See if you can notice anything." He said as Joey eagerly accepted the small piece of colored, magical, glass and pressed it into his eye. "Back up." James added. "Might be a touch dangerous until I get up there." Joey obeyed, quickly back-stepping several yards.

Alright. Jet engine. Like a cross between the fire spell, the explosion spell, and the oxygen wind spell. All happening thousands of times a second..... At a constant rate. He thought as he began drawing in magical energy. *Easy. I came up with it. Joey, Veliry, and google figured out the HOW... more or less. And she's using it even now. I got this.*

He focused on the soles of his feet.

"Woaaaaaah!" Joey said from where he was standing. "James.... Your energy is way different from Veliry's."

James wanted to ask what he meant. But he knew better from previous "experiments" that he needed to focus.

FFFFFFWWWWWOOOOOOOOOO-

James felt himself lift of the ground. He also HEARD the sound of the ground scorching and rocks being scattered beneath his feet.

OOOOOOOOOOOOOSSSSSSSSSSSHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

James gradually picked up speed until he'd neared where Veliry was still hovering and trying to stabilize herself.

"Seriously." She said as he pulled back on the flow. "This is.... difficult. Focused levitation is much more efficient."

James emitted a blast of high pressure air from his palm to lock his position as his slow climb became a similar hover.

"Yeah. But this is faster." He countered.

"Is it?" She asked. "Did you see me on the wall of Jadesport? I can move faster than you think while flying my way."

"First;" He began. "You know I didn't. Second; you needed like.... six other mages to help you channel energy for that. I can fly faster by myself."

"And as you already pointed out. You end up at the healers a lot." She shot back.

"Yeah. Fair." He admitted. "But seriously." He said with a grin. "Watch my energy real quick."

"Wha-" She began to ask, before being cut off by James accelerating.

"KEEP UP THIS TIME!" He yelled over his shoulder as he began rocketing up and away.

"Gods dammit! JAMES!" She yelled as she began accelerating to match him.

"I...AM... IRON... MAN!!!" James yelled out in an attempt at a robotic voice as he continued accelerating.

Below them, watching with silent awe was Joey.

He saw the energy flow into their bodies and focus on their legs and arms before flowing out of their feet, and occasionally their hands.

He also watched the maelstrom of different energies flowing around them in a vortex of multicolored, vaporous forms. From the air, the ground, even from each other. Though the latter was always halted after a moment.

His unadorned eye saw them fly off in a trail of heat and vapor as their jet-like feet scorched the air as they passed.

He longed to join them.

Once they'd flown far enough away, Joey did what came naturally to him. In fact, it was one of the few things that DID come naturally to him.

He looked around with the monocle, marveling at the different, latent, magical energies that he saw flowing and ebbing, and occasionally

bursting, around him. It was like looking into a tide with an oil sheen on its surface. But he could see that there was life there. Or maybe not... LIFE.... life. But something similar.

Allowing his curiosity to get the better of him, he held his hand up in front of the monocle.

"Wooooooaaaahhhh." He said softly as he saw the light orange energy pulsing there. It looked like James's did, albeit much weaker. But it was different in a way that he suspected was unique to him. He began to wonder if everyone's energy was different, and resolved to continue using the monocle as he made his way back into the castle.

But he'd also ask Veliry. Her mind worked very similarly to his, even if she was better at the social interactions that he worked so hard to understand.

Plus, he just liked asking her things.

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Dranek looked into the room with an expression that he hoped these "Doctors" would read as pride. Though he didn't FEEL any pride. Especially not while wearing the silver laced, upgraded, restraints they'd placed him in.

He could walk, albeit slowly, and he could move his head. But the rest of his body was in a web of chains, cables, and plates that only avoided burning his skin because of the layer of cloth in the way.

If he tried to break out, not that he could in this form, they would cut through his clothes in the process and eventually kill him.

How his body knew what phase the moon was in in a different world, and in a facility with no view of the sky, he didn't know. In fact, he didn't even know if this world's moon held any sway over him. Maybe the goddess was the cause.

"Anyways, what do you think?" Asked the so called doctor. "I know that the.... turning... fights... have been rough on you. But they're all alive.... Minus one."

"I would expect no less from werewolves." Dranek said. "I imagine that... ONE.... died at the hands of your experiments?" It was a rhetorical question. He knew the answer from the smell of the man's fear at the question.

"We.... needed to know what it takes to uh.... put a werewolf down." The man admitted.

And so you killed a member of MY pack? Dranek wondered.

Instead he said. "Understandable. At least they weren't citizens of my world. I would have to kill you if they had been."

I'm going to kill you all the same... in time.

On the other side of the thick, silver barred, glass the six werewolves looked back at him from their restrained positions.

Goddess. Do they know? He asked.

They know enough. She answered.

Good. He thought back. He looked at the "Doctor" without turning his head. The annoying little man was blabbering about something and didn't notice. But he saw the other wolves follow his gaze.

Dranek bared his teeth in a way that, on his human form, simply looked like a smile.

But it was all the message THEY needed to understand his intent.

They "Smiled" back.

"Ah." Said the doctor. "They seem happy to see their primogenitor."

"Their what?" Dranek asked with a cocked eyebrow.

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"Well... of course." The man answered eagerly. "I didn't think you'd be up for it now that you're um... human?"

Dranek suppressed a grin. "You will find that even like this." He said with a look down at his body. "I am MORE than human."

And oooooh won't he learn that soon enough.

Dranek watched the man turn to the guards nearby and signal for the door while saying something to them in his own language. He used the distraction to wink at the wolves in the room before him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (229/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yeah I'm still alive. I told y'all I was gonna be on vacation for a week. Bit of a short and sweet one. Still a bit jet lagged.

EEEEENNNNNNNJJJJJOOOOOOYYYYYYY!!!!!!

\~

BOOM!

"Okay." James said as he peered through the little orange-ish brown monocle Veliry had given him. "Good height..... Oh. I see what you mean about the energy flow. God that's weird."

Boom! BoomBoomboom....

"This is much harder than you make it look!" Veliry yelled back as she stabilized herself in mid air.

pop-po-po-pop! fsssssSSSSSSSHHHHHH!!!

"Ohhhhh yeah! That's it!" James exclaimed. "Hold that. That's the jet." He instructed as he watched the magical energy flowing through the mage's legs harmonize and eventually become a smaller, but steadier tempo.

Instead of a series of small stabilizing explosion, the magical emanations from Veliry's feet had become nearly identical to the thrusters of a fighter jet. Though much smaller.

"Ramp it up!" Joey yelled excitedly from beside him as he watched the experiment.

"Gre-" Veliry began before wavering in the air.

"Use your hands to stabilize!" James directed.

Boom! An explosion emanated from the hand closest to the ground, sending her back up straight.

"Oh gods!" She said as she straightened back up. "HOW DO YOU DO THIS IN A FIGHT?!?!"

"Well!" James began sarcastically. "I do spend a lot of time at the healers! Remember?"

A few moments, and a few more explosions, later and Veliry was flying with fairly good stability.

James handed the monocle to Joey.

"Here bud. Watch the energy. See if you can notice anything." He said as Joey eagerly accepted the small piece of colored, magical, glass and pressed it into his eye. "Back up." James added. "Might be a touch dangerous until I get up there." Joey obeyed, quickly back-stepping several yards.

Alright. Jet engine. Like a cross between the fire spell, the explosion spell, and the oxygen wind spell. All happening thousands of times a second..... At a constant rate. He thought as he began drawing in magical energy. *Easy. I came up with it. Joey, Veliry, and google figured out the HOW... more or less. And she's using it even now. I got this.*

He focused on the soles of his feet.

"Woaaaaaah!" Joey said from where he was standing. "James.... Your energy is way different from Veliry's."

James wanted to ask what he meant. But he knew better from previous "experiments" that he needed to focus.

FFFFFFWWWWWWOOOOOOOOOO-

James felt himself lift of the ground. He also HEARD the sound of the ground scorching and rocks being scattered beneath his feet.

OOOOOOOOOOOOOSSSSSSSSSSSHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

James gradually picked up speed until he'd neared where Veliry was still hovering and trying to stabilize herself.

"Seriously." She said as he pulled back on the flow. "This is.... difficult. Focused levitation is much more efficient."

James emitted a blast of high pressure air from his palm to lock his position as his slow climb became a similar hover.

"Yeah. But this is faster." He countered.

"Is it?" She asked. "Did you see me on the wall of Jadesport? I can move faster than you think while flying my way."

"First;" He began. "You know I didn't. Second; you needed like.... six other mages to help you channel energy for that. I can fly faster by myself."

"And as you already pointed out. You end up at the healers a lot." She shot back.

"Yeah. Fair." He admitted. "But seriously." He said with a grin. "Watch my energy real quick."

"Wha-" She began to ask, before being cut off by James accelerating.

"KEEP UP THIS TIME!" He yelled over his shoulder as he began rocketing up and away.

"Gods dammit! JAMES!" She yelled as she began accelerating to match him.

"I...AM... IRON... MAN!!!" James yelled out in an attempt at a robotic voice as he continued accelerating.

Below them, watching with silent awe was Joey.

He saw the energy flow into their bodies and focus on their legs and arms before flowing out of their feet, and occasionally their hands.

He also watched the maelstrom of different energies flowing around them in a vortex of multicolored, vaporous forms. From the air, the ground, even from each other. Though the latter was always halted after a moment.

His unadorned eye saw them fly off in a trail of heat and vapor as their jet-like feet scorched the air as they passed.

He longed to join them.

Once they'd flown far enough away, Joey did what came naturally to him. In fact, it was one of the few things that DID come naturally to him.

He looked around with the monocle, marveling at the different, latent, magical energies that he saw flowing and ebbing, and occasionally bursting, around him. It was like looking into a tide with an oil sheen on its surface. But he could see that there was life there. Or maybe not... LIFE.... life. But something similar.

Allowing his curiosity to get the better of him, he held his hand up in front of the monocle.

"Wooooooaaaahhhh." He said softly as he saw the light orange energy pulsing there. It looked like James's did, albeit much weaker. But it was different in a way that he suspected was unique to him. He began to wonder if everyone's energy was different, and resolved to continue using the monocle as he made his way back into the castle.

But he'd also ask Veliry. Her mind worked very similarly to his, even if she was better at the social interactions that he worked so hard to understand.

Plus, he just liked asking her things.

\--------------------

Dranek looked into the room with an expression that he hoped these "Doctors" would read as pride. Though he didn't FEEL any pride. Especially not while wearing the silver laced, upgraded, restraints they'd placed him in.

He could walk, albeit slowly, and he could move his head. But the rest of his body was in a web of chains, cables, and plates that only avoided burning his skin because of the layer of cloth in the way.

If he tried to break out, not that he could in this form, they would cut through his clothes in the process and eventually kill him.

How his body knew what phase the moon was in in a different world, and in a facility with no view of the sky, he didn't know. In fact, he didn't even know if this world's moon held any sway over him. Maybe the goddess was the cause.

"Anyways, what do you think?" Asked the so called doctor. "I know that the.... turning... fights... have been rough on you. But they're all alive.... Minus one."

"I would expect no less from werewolves." Dranek said. "I imagine that... ONE.... died at the hands of your experiments?" It was a rhetorical question. He knew the answer from the smell of the man's fear at the question.

"We.... needed to know what it takes to uh.... put a werewolf down." The man admitted.

And so you killed a member of MY pack? Dranek wondered.

Instead he said. "Understandable. At least they weren't citizens of my world. I would have to kill you if they had been."

I'm going to kill you all the same... in time.

On the other side of the thick, silver barred, glass the six werewolves looked back at him from their restrained positions.

Goddess. Do they know? He asked.

They know enough. She answered.

Good. He thought back. He looked at the "Doctor" without turning his head. The annoying little man was blabbering about something and didn't notice. But he saw the other wolves follow his gaze.

Dranek bared his teeth in a way that, on his human form, simply looked like a smile.

But it was all the message THEY needed to understand his intent.

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"What?" Amina asked. "She's got the same 'I'll kick anyone's ass if they mess with my boys' kind of aura around her."

"Well... yeah...." James agreed. "But why bring her up now?"

"What?" Amina asked again. "We were talking about your brother, and the desert, and Gixelle, I thought it was a talk about family."

"I mean... yeah..." James admitted. Then his hand reached up and planted on the small of her back, gentle but firm. "But I thought we could uh.... do some.... hot springs.... stuff... too."

She stared at him with flat eyes as she dropped the papers over the side of the bed.

"You mean get drunk enough that we fall asleep with nothing happening?" She deadpanned.

"Can we skip the 'nothing happening' part?" He asked with his eyes squinted and eyebrows raised. "Or at least the sleep part?"

She tried to keep her composure, but James's hand caressing her back, and his goofy expression prevented her from holding out.

She broke out in a grin.

"Fine." She said. "But you have to do that thing again."

James jumped up eagerly. "Still feels odd that you only want that from the wolf hand." He said. She glanced at him reproachfully. "But I have a wolf hand, so it's all good." He assured her before diving at her.

\---

The next day James walked happily through the town with his little brother, sleep deprived as he was, in tow.

"James. Can't I go back to the castle?" Joey asked in a drone. "I'm so tired."

"And whose fault is that little bro?" He shot back with a grin. "Told you dinner was at seven. You're the one that stayed up all night with Veliry talking about how steam engines worked."

"It wasn't just steam engines." Joey said with a hint of upset. "That was just the part you walked in on. You missed the whole seminar on how magic suffuses the body of a non-local like me or mom. Or you, back when you first got here." He held up his hands as if he was casting a spell. "Plus she explained how her deathbolts are actually how she stays so young looking. Did you know she's almost in her forties? I thought she was our age."

"Yeah?" James wondered as he peered around, a wistful smile permanently plastered to his face. Then he realized what Joey had just said. "Wait.... What?"

Joey hung his head a bit. "Also I probably won't be able to use magic for at least a few months."

James shook his little brother lightly by the shoulders. "Cheer up bud. It took me almost half a year before I could. And I had to almost die to figure it out." He shook his head. "Also, what was that about Veliry's age?"

"That was your catalyst event right?" Joey asked, ignoring the question. "With the grabber clan?"

"She told you about that?"

Joey chuckled a bit. "She also told me that Prince Alixan had to throw a density altering magical spear at you in order to unlock your reflex vision power."

"Of course she told you about that too." James grumbled. Then he pulled Joey to a stop. "We're here." He said with a smile.

Joey looked up at the sign. "What's it say?"Is this a tailor?" He asked as he pointed at the painted image of a sewing needle and a dress.

"Yep." James said. "Best in town too. Come on. I wanted to show you my surprise for the wedding." He added as he guided Joey inside.

"I was wondering why we were shopping again when we did that yesterday." Joey said before yawning. "Makes sense if its a surprise though."

Twenty minutes later, after having it pulled from the backroom where it was sitting in its box, and after having the tailor help him don it, James emerged from the dressing room.

"Woah!" Joey said as he suddenly woke up at the sight of his older brother. "Is that?"

"Just like dad's right?" James asked. "You know, the one handed down from great grandfather. Just, you know, threw a bit of purple and black in the design." He said as he pointed at some of the design. "You know, kinda my thing since I've gotten here."

Joey pinched some of the fabric. "It looks just like the real ones from home." Joey said. "Is it silk too?"

"Dark Elf spider silk." The tailor said. "Best the deep dark has to offer in the off season. It'll also stop most slashing attacks. Though, don't let anyone stab you or shoot you with a bow. Anything that specializes in piercing or stabbing is its big weakness." The older orc said as he inspected the fit of the garment.

"Huh. Cool." James said. "Big bonus."

"Dark elf spider silk?" Joey said in amazement as he absently stared at the tailor. "Like Drizzt and Lolth and them?"

"Who?" The tailor asked.

James shook his head. "I've been assured that the dark elves are actually really friendly." He assured his little brother. "Bit rigid. But decent."

"That's just elves in general." The tailor added. "Dark elves live a hard life in the deep dark. That rigidity keeps them alive."

Joey listened with rapt attention.

"What do you think?" James asked, snapping him out of his daze."

Joey beheld the blue cloth with dark purple and black details.

Then he grinned.

"I think mom AND Amina will both love it." He said as he ran his fingers across some of the embroidery while mouthing the words 'dark elf spider silk' to himself. Then he looked back up at James for a moment. "Did you get a hat?"

James rolled his eyes. "Yeeeesss." He said sarcastically. "Not a fan of them." He said as he looked back at the fitting mirror. "But. I gotta admit. This thing doesn't look quite complete without one." He smiled at the tailor. "No offense. It looks fantastic." Then he looked back at Joey. "That's a few shops over."

The tailor shrugged his massive shoulders. "A hat would look nice with it." He agreed, one hand rubbing his wispy grey beard. "Dreymoor's hattery?" He asked. James nodded in response. "A fine store." The orc said simply.

"Can...." Joey began, looking around at the tailor's offerings. "Can I get one?"

James looked at his brother with a smile. "Why do you think I brought you Jojo?" He asked rhetorically. "You are gonna be my best man. Aren't you?"

Joey smiled and wrapped his brother in a hug.

"Easy bud. New clothes." James said before returning the hug. Then as Joey released it James turned him around to face the orc.

"Mr. Brimjaw, you have a new client." He said with a smile.

"I'd picked up on that." The orc said. "Same budget restraint?"

"You mean lack thereof?" James asked. "Of course."

"I love working for the overly wealthy." The tailor said with a grin. Then he pointed Joey at the mirrors behind James and pulled a stool out. "Step on up short tooth."

"Are you THAT rich?" Joey asked absently as he stepped on the stool. Then his eyes snapped to the side of the mirror as Brimjaw pressed a small symbol on the side of the frame that lit up. After a few seconds of the tailor concentrating, an image appeared on the mirror over Joey's body. It showed him wearing a similar men's hanbok to his brother's, as well as symbols that he assumed were some kind of measurements, though he didn't understand them.

"Wooooah." He exclaimed with a grin as he moved his arm and watched the reflected image match it perfectly.

"Stand still young one." The old orc said as he began jotting down measurements.

James chuckled as he stepped into one of the other fitting booths to change back into his normal clothes.

\---

Dranek grunted as the people in the oddly textured white clothes, who he thought might be healers under other circumstances, poked and prodded his still sore body.

"How are you feeling today Dranek?" The young woman, that he assumed was in charge, asked. "I understand you took a bit of a beating after you um... affected... subject Navarro."

"As you can see." Dranek said, gesturing at his body and the handful of still present wounds. "I am still healing."

"I do see that." She said with a smile that he knew was fake. "Tell me; do you know HOW your body heals?"

Dranek nodded smugly. "Of course I do." He said simply. The other two people stopped what they were doing for just a moment to look at him curiously. They returned to their inspection at a glance from the woman.

"The magic of my goddess protects all her children, even outcasts, and grants us durability and longevity. So we may carry her blessing across the lands." He gestured at the room around them. "And now, to other worlds. It is this blessing that allows me to weather almost any injury."

The woman maintained the smile, though Dranek did see it falter ever so slightly. Clearly his answer hadn't been the one she was looking for. Still, she lifted her clipboard and clicked her writing utensil.

"Longevity you say? How long does the average werewolf live?" She asked.

"For wolves the average is an extension of life of roughly half." Dranek said. "A human may end up living to be nearly.... mmmmm... one hundred and fifty years old. Give or take a decade. While an elf may see their life extended from one millenia, to nearly two."

The woman wrote down those numbers eagerly. Dranek continued.

"For other Werefolk however, the numbers are different." He said. "I once met one of the feline types who was nearly three centuries old, and he was of human stock. And not born one of the folk either."

"Interesting." She said as she wrote. "So, there are other types of.... were...folk?" She asked.

"Very many." He answered, watching as she wrote frantically. "Wolves are simply the most numerous due to certain.... proclivities... and hard fought instincts."

"And how many.... werefolk.... are there?"

"I will not give you a precise answer to that." Dranek said firmly. "Not only because that would tell more about my world than I am comfortable letting you know. But also because I do not actually know." He paused. "It is a large number though."

"That is fair." She said as she finished writing her notes. "Tell me. Do your injuries hurt? The damage to your ear looks dreadful."

Dranek reached up and touched the still healing stub of an ear. It would grow back just fine, though it would likely take several days.

"All injuries hurt." He said with a hint of sarcasm. "Though I have been told by several of the turned that pain is significantly lessened once you are turned. " He looked down at a long gash in his thigh that was raw and pink, and not yet re-furred. "But according to them it is akin to being.... numbed."

"So you're not in any significant pain right now?" She asked.

"Significant? No." He said. "And I have had significantly worse injuries before."

Goddess? Why do you want me to tell them these things? Should we not HIDE this information from my world's enemies?

Tactically? Maybe. She answered. ***But there is value in giving your enemies something to fear..... and covet.***

Covet?

Think about it dear Dranek. They did not ask you to turn that dreadful Navarro for nothing. They're testing it for themselves. They crave power more than anyone you have ever met. And to them, that is what you represent. A chance at power.

And we are giving it to them?

You know better than any; the double edged nature of being a werewolf.

I..... Think... I understand.

You will. She assured him.

"Mr. Dranek?" The woman asked, snapping him out of his....conversation.

"Yes?" He asked in return.

"I asked if you needed anything for your new lodgings. The exam is over for today."

"You mean my cell?" He asked.

She nodded awkwardly. "Yes." She admitted.

"I would prefer to have grass underfoot." He answered truthfully. "Though I doubt that's an option."

She nodded again. "You're probably right." She agreed. "But I can maybe ask about some turf."

Dranek raised an eyebrow at that.

\----------

"MOON WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

"War." She said with annoyance. "Always with the yelling. We're both gods. You don't need to intimidate me." She reminded him. Though war had always had this issue.

"Sorry." He said, having adjusted his volume. "Last time I spoke to anyone directly it was on Anchuria. You know how that place is."

She sighed as she turned her attention toward him properly. "Your favorite world." She said.

"Not even top five." War answered. "Their warfare is so repetitive and simple. A good meal. But bland."

She felt his attention turn to her more acutely. "Seriously. What are you doing?"

"The exact same thing you WOULD be doing if this world weren't already so rich with your favorite energy." She sent him a wave of judgmental energy. "Besides. My motives will only add more of it for you."

"I know that." He said. "My real question is why?"

She gestured at the world below them, and at the moon floating over it. She couldn't believe that it had allowed the pathetic mortals here to touch it without even sacrificing anyone to do so in a ritual. War could feel her anger at it.

"Look at it." She said. "One of our strangest, and yet... most rewarding... experimental worlds." She paused. "MAAAAGIC!!!!" She yelled though their shared incorporeal realm of this universe.

"Do you have to call them?" War asked. "I know they're here now. But do we really need to involve them?"

"About."

"Time."

"You."

"Others."

"Remembered."

"To."

"Include."

"Us."

Magic said in their jilting, back and forth, way of communicating. A product of their ever waning presence. One that was made all the worse because of how little magic there actually was in this existence.

"Hello Magic." War said without hiding his displeasure.

"Hello."

"War."

"And.

"Moon."

>!\---------Writer's note: Okay, y'all get the idea. Magic is meant to be annoying and even more unknowable than most Gods. I'm not keeping that format for magic from here on out. Imagine that shit on your own. ---------!<

"Magic." Moon replied. "I know how hungry this world must have you right now."

"Starving." Magic replied.

"Well." Moon said, pulling War in close. If they'd had tangible bodies she would have had an arm around his shoulder. "I have a solution for it."

"We. Are. Listening." Magic said. "Though. We. Can. Already. Figure. It. Out."

"Good." Moon said. "And if it goes the way I think. It should be the birth of a new sibling for us. War. I think you know what they might end up being."

War thought for a moment, using his universal omniscience to examine everything he knew of Moon's current manipulations.

"Hmmm. I don't think Stability or Life will like them." He said.

Moon let out radiant happiness. "That's their problem. We all know they could both use a challenge for a change. Especially Life."

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"Well... yeah...." James agreed. "But why bring her up now?"

"What?" Amina asked again. "We were talking about your brother, and the desert, and Gixelle, I thought it was a talk about family."

"I mean... yeah..." James admitted. Then his hand reached up and planted on the small of her back, gentle but firm. "But I thought we could uh.... do some.... hot springs.... stuff... too."

She stared at him with flat eyes as she dropped the papers over the side of the bed.

"You mean get drunk enough that we fall asleep with nothing happening?" She deadpanned.

"Can we skip the 'nothing happening' part?" He asked with his eyes squinted and eyebrows raised. "Or at least the sleep part?"

She tried to keep her composure, but James's hand caressing her back, and his goofy expression prevented her from holding out.

She broke out in a grin.

"Fine." She said. "But you have to do that thing again."

James jumped up eagerly. "Still feels odd that you only want that from the wolf hand." He said. She glanced at him reproachfully. "But I have a wolf hand, so it's all good." He assured her before diving at her.

\---------------------------

The next day James walked happily through the town with his little brother, sleep deprived as he was, in tow.

"James. Can't I go back to the castle?" Joey asked in a drone. "I'm so tired."

"And whose fault is that little bro?" He shot back with a grin. "Told you dinner was at seven. You're the one that stayed up all night with Veliry talking about how steam engines worked."

"It wasn't just steam engines." Joey said with a hint of upset. "That was just the part you walked in on. You missed the whole seminar on how magic suffuses the body of a non-local like me or mom. Or you, back when you first got here." He held up his hands as if he was casting a spell. "Plus she explained how her deathbolts are actually how she stays so young looking. Did you know she's almost in her forties? I thought she was our age."

"Yeah?" James wondered as he peered around, a wistful smile permanently plastered to his face. Then he realized what Joey had just said. "Wait.... What?"

Joey hung his head a bit. "Also I probably won't be able to use magic for at least a few months."

James shook his little brother lightly by the shoulders. "Cheer up bud. It took me almost half a year before I could. And I had to almost die to figure it out." He shook his head. "Also, what was that about Veliry's age?"

"That was your catalyst event right?" Joey asked, ignoring the question. "With the grabber clan?"

"She told you about that?"

Joey chuckled a bit. "She also told me that Prince Alixan had to throw a density altering magical spear at you in order to unlock your reflex vision power."

"Of course she told you about that too." James grumbled. Then he pulled Joey to a stop. "We're here." He said with a smile.

Joey looked up at the sign. "What's it say?"Is this a tailor?" He asked as he pointed at the painted image of a sewing needle and a dress.

"Yep." James said. "Best in town too. Come on. I wanted to show you my surprise for the wedding." He added as he guided Joey inside.

"I was wondering why we were shopping again when we did that yesterday." Joey said before yawning. "Makes sense if its a surprise though."

Twenty minutes later, after having it pulled from the backroom where it was sitting in its box, and after having the tailor help him don it, James emerged from the dressing room.

"Woah!" Joey said as he suddenly woke up at the sight of his older brother. "Is that?"

"Just like dad's right?" James asked. "You know, the one handed down from great grandfather. Just, you know, threw a bit of purple and black in the design." He said as he pointed at some of the design. "You know, kinda my thing since I've gotten here."

Joey pinched some of the fabric. "It looks just like the real ones from home." Joey said. "Is it silk too?"

"Dark Elf spider silk." The tailor said. "Best the deep dark has to offer in the off season. It'll also stop most slashing attacks. Though, don't let anyone stab you or shoot you with a bow. Anything that specializes in piercing or stabbing is its big weakness." The older orc said as he inspected the fit of the garment.

"Huh. Cool." James said. "Big bonus."

"Dark elf spider silk?" Joey said in amazement as he absently stared at the tailor. "Like Drizzt and Lolth and them?"

"Who?" The tailor asked.

James shook his head. "I've been assured that the dark elves are actually really friendly." He assured his little brother. "Bit rigid. But decent."

"That's just elves in general." The tailor added. "Dark elves live a hard life in the deep dark. That rigidity keeps them alive."

Joey listened with rapt attention.

"What do you think?" James asked, snapping him out of his daze."

Joey beheld the blue cloth with dark purple and black details.

Then he grinned.

"I think mom AND Amina will both love it." He said as he ran his fingers across some of the embroidery while mouthing the words 'dark elf spider silk' to himself. Then he looked back up at James for a moment. "Did you get a hat?"

James rolled his eyes. "Yeeeessss." He said sarcastically. "Not a fan of them." He said as he looked back at the fitting mirror. "But. I gotta admit. This thing doesn't look quite complete without one." He smiled at the tailor. "No offense. It looks fantastic." Then he looked back at Joey. "That's a few shops over."

The tailor shrugged his massive shoulders. "A hat would look nice with it." He agreed, one hand rubbing his wispy grey beard. "Dreymoor's hattery?" He asked. James nodded in response. "A fine store." The orc said simply.

"Can...." Joey began, looking around at the tailor's offerings. "Can I get one?"

James looked at his brother with a smile. "Why do you think I brought you Jojo?" He asked rhetorically. "You are gonna be my best man. Aren't you?"

Joey smiled and wrapped his brother in a hug.

"Easy bud. New clothes." James said before returning the hug. Then as Joey released it James turned him around to face the orc.

"Mr. Brimjaw, you have a new client." He said with a smile.

"I'd picked up on that." The orc said. "Same budget restraint?"

"You mean lack thereof?" James asked. "Of course."

"I love working for the overly wealthy." The tailor said with a grin. Then he pointed Joey at the mirrors behind James and pulled a stool out. "Step on up short tooth."

"Are you THAT rich?" Joey asked absently as he stepped on the stool. Then his eyes snapped to the side of the mirror as Brimjaw pressed a small symbol on the side of the frame that lit up. After a few seconds of the tailor concentrating, an image appeared on the mirror over Joey's body. It showed him wearing a similar men's hanbok to his brother's, as well as symbols that he assumed were some kind of measurements, though he didn't understand them.

"Wooooah." He exclaimed with a grin as he moved his arm and watched the reflected image match it perfectly.

"Stand still young one." The old orc said as he began jotting down measurements.

James chuckled as he stepped into one of the other fitting booths to change back into his normal clothes.

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Dranek grunted as the people in the oddly textured white clothes, who he thought might be healers under other circumstances, poked and prodded his still sore body.

"How are you feeling today Dranek?" The young woman, that he assumed was in charge, asked. "I understand you took a bit of a beating after you um... affected... subject Navarro."

"As you can see." Dranek said, gesturing at his body and the handful of still present wounds. "I am still healing."

"I do see that." She said with a smile that he knew was fake. "Tell me; do you know HOW your body heals?"

Dranek nodded smugly. "Of course I do." He said simply. The other two people stopped what they were doing for just a moment to look at him curiously. They returned to their inspection at a glance from the woman. "The magic of my goddess protects all her children, even outcasts, and grants us durability and longevity. So we may carry her blessing across the lands." He gestured at the room around them. "And now, to other worlds. It is this blessing that allows me to weather almost any injury."

The woman maintained the smile, though Dranek did see it falter ever so slightly. Clearly his answer hadn't been the one she was looking for. Still, she lifted her clipboard and clicked her writing utensil.

"Longevity you say? How long does the average werewolf live?" She asked.

"For wolves the average is an extension of life of roughly half." Dranek said. "A human may end up living to be nearly.... mmmmm... one hundred

and fifty years old. Give or take a decade. While an elf may see their life extended from one millenia, to nearly two."

The woman wrote down those numbers eagerly. Dranek continued.

"For other Werefolk however, the numbers are different." He said. "I once met one of the feline types who was nearly three centuries old, and he was of human stock. And not born one of the folk either."

"Interesting." She said as she wrote. "So, there are other types of.... were...folk?" She asked.

"Very many." He answered, watching as she wrote frantically. "Wolves are simply the most numerous due to certain.... proclivities... and hard fought instincts."

"And how many.... werefolk.... are there?"

"I will not give you a precise answer to that." Dranek said firmly. "Not only because that would tell more about my world than I am comfortable letting you know. But also because I do not actually know." He paused. "It is a large number though."

"That is fair." She said as she finished writing her notes. "Tell me. Do your injuries hurt? The damage to your ear looks dreadful."

Dranek reached up and touched the still healing stub of an ear. It would grow back just fine, though it would likely take several days.

"All injuries hurt." He said with a hint of sarcasm. "Though I have been told by several of the turned that pain is significantly lessened once you are turned. " He looked down at a long gash in his thigh that was raw and pink, and not yet re-furred. "But according to them it is akin to being.... numbed."

"So you're not in any significant pain right now?" She asked.

"Significant? No." He said. "And I have had significantly worse injuries before."

Goddess? Why do you want me to tell them these things? Should we not HIDE this information from my world's enemies?

Tactically? Maybe. She answered. ***But there is value in giving your enemies something to fear..... and covet.***

Covet?

Think about it dear Dranek. They did not ask you to turn that dreadful Navarro for nothing. They're testing it for themselves. They crave power more than anyone you have ever met. And to them, that is what you represent. A chance at power.

And we are giving it to them?

You know better than any; the double edged nature of being a werewolf.

I..... Think... I understand.

You will. She assured him.

"Mr. Dranek?" The woman asked, snapping him out of his....conversation.

"Yes?" He asked in return.

"I asked if you needed anything for your new lodgings. The exam is over for today."

"You mean my cell?" He asked.

She nodded awkwardly. "Yes." She admitted.

"I would prefer to have grass underfoot." He answered truthfully. "Though I doubt that's an option."

She nodded again. "You're probably right." She agreed. "But I can maybe ask about some turf."

Dranek raised an eyebrow at that.

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"MOON WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

"War." She said with annoyance. "Always with the yelling. We're both gods. You don't need to intimidate me." She reminded him. Though war had always had this issue.

"Sorry." He said, having adjusted his volume. "Last time I spoke to anyone directly it was on Anchuria. You know how that place is."

She sighed as she turned her attention toward him properly. "Your favorite world." She said.

"Not even top five." War answered. "Their warfare is so repetitive and simple. A good meal. But bland."

She felt his attention turn to her more acutely. "Seriously. What are you doing?"

"The exact same thing you WOULD be doing if this world weren't already so rich with your favorite energy." She sent him a wave of judgmental energy. "Besides. My motives will only add more of it for you."

"I know that." He said. "My real question is why?"

She gestured at the world below them, and at the moon floating over it. She couldn't believe that it had allowed the pathetic mortals here to touch it without even sacrificing anyone to do so in a ritual. War could feel her anger at it.

"Look at it." She said. "One of our strangest, and yet... most rewarding... experimental worlds." She paused. "MAAAAGIC!!!!" She yelled though their shared incorporeal realm of this universe.

"Do you have to call them?" War asked. "I know they're here now. But do we really need to involve them?"

"About."

"Time."

"You."

"Others."

"Remembered."

"To."

"Include."

"Us."

Magic said in their jilting, back and forth, way of communicating. A product of their ever waning presence. One that was made all the worse because of how little magic there actually was in this existence.

"Hello Magic." War said without hiding his displeasure.

"Hello."

"War."

"And.

"Moon."

>!\---------Writer's note: Okay, y'all get the idea. Magic is meant to be annoying and even more unknowable than most Gods. I'm not keeping that format for magic from here on out. Imagine that shit on your own. ---------!<

"Magic." Moon replied. "I know how hungry this world must have you right now."

"Starving." Magic replied.

"Well." Moon said, pulling War in close. If they'd had tangible bodies she would have had an arm around his shoulder. "I have a solution for it."

"We. Are. Listening." Magic said. "Though. We. Can. Already. Figure. It. Out."

"Good." Moon said. "And if it goes the way I think. It should be the birth of a new sibling for us. War. I think you know what they might end up being."

War thought for a moment, using his universal omniscience to examine everything he knew of Moon's current manipulations.

"Hmmm. I don't think Stability or Life will like them." He said.

Moon let out radiant happiness. "That's their problem. We all know they could both use a challenge for a change. Especially Life."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xps67e/wait_is_this_just_gate_229/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (227/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xefmfx/wait_is_this_just_gate_226/)

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"I saw him earlier, talking to one of the castle staff. Poor elf girl looked uncomfortable." Vickers said.

James groaned as they began walking to the castle. "I told him to slow down a bit." He said. "I'll rein him in."

They walked in silence for a moment, Vickers easily carrying the box that stored all the small drones in it.

"So what's the game plan?" The older SEAL asked, breaking the silence.

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"Okay Joey. Now, what's the new rule?" James said a few hours later after he'd tracked down his little brother.

"Ask people if they're willing to discuss their species before you ACTUALLY ask them about their species." Joey responded rapidly. "And give them chances to speak in between my questions."

"And?" James prompted as they neared the curious door.

"What's with that door?" Joey asked.

"Nah nah nah Jojo." James replied. "AAAAaaaand?"

Joey clapped his hands together, almost as if praying, and then interlaced his fingers between his palms. "Every few minutes ask them if they're still okay talking."

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"Hello Captain Choi!" Said an odd, somewhat feminine voice. "Hello Mr. Choi."

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"To who?" Joey asked as he looked around.

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"I am a mage's door." It answered. "Designed to keep unwanted intruders from entering an area that could have untold secrets.... and dangers."

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"The Arch Mage has bid you enter." The door said as it retracted into the wall.

"Thank you." James said. Then he pushed Joey forward.

"I don't like that." Joey said, still whispering. He peered at the edges of the doorway as they passed, though he couldn't see any sign of the door in the stonework. "Where did it go?"

"I..... do not ask questions like that anymore." James said. "Buddy." He said, turning Joey's head back forward. "Behold...."

Joey looked forward and his mouth gaped at the sight.

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As the greenish smoke cleared, Veliry was revealed lying on the floor underneath where the cloud of, James assumed, poisonous smoke had been. She was wearing a heavy black cloak and something that James thought might have been a gas mask.

"Uhhhhh.... Vel?" James asked.

The masked form turned its head to hold them.

"James?" Joey asked.

>!"James?"!< The masked Veliry asked, though neither of the two brothers could understand her as her voice was muffled by the mask. Then she saw Joey.

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"You must be Joey!" She exclaimed as she quickly began looking him over. She pulled at the dark grey, bordering on black, robes that Joey had bought with James's money the day before. She peered over Joey's shoulder at James. "These aren't Earth clothes." She said accusingly.

"Uhhh.... no?" James said. "Was that a requirement?"

Veliry thought for a moment, still holding Joey's shirt in her hands, oblivious to how awkward Joey was feeling with someone new so close to him. Though he WAS incredibly distracted by the fact that the small redhead was floating nearly two feet off of the ground to do so.

Joey's hand shot out straight in front of him, brushing past Veliry's midsection, and positioned itself as if waiting for a handshake. Both James and Veliry stared at it confused.

"I'm Joseph Choi." He said loudly, though not quite yelling. "Pleased to meet you. Please call me Joey."

Then Joey looked at his own hand in shock. He drew it back in and offered it to Veliry more properly while looking at her face for a moment.

She shrugged and took the hand. "Nice to meet you Joey." She said with a smile. "Your brother says you are incredibly interested in magic."

Joey looked at her again with a beaming smile.

"Yes please." He said.

James looked on with a smile as he saw Joey peer around the room, completely forgetting the hand shake as he took in all the magical things around him.

He slowly crept out of the room. "Don't get him killed Vel." He said as he neared the door. "And don't turn him into a Bogaroe or Whoopy Frog or something." He pointed a stern finger at his brother. "Don't get yourself blown up. Mom'll kill you."

That snapped both of them out of their distracted examinations/greeting.

"What's a Bogaroe?" Joey asked curiously.

"What's a Whoopy Frog?" Veliry asked at the same moment, her face scrunched in confusion.

"What?" They both asked each other simultaneously.

"You heard me." He said as the animated door sealed behind him. "JOEY! DINNER'S AT SEVEN!" He yelled over his shoulder.

He walked away happy to know that both of the two super nerds were going to have their fill of questions and answers for the next few hours. Though he did kind of doubt that Joey would remember dinner.

Then he thought of the awkward, even by Joey's standards, greeting he'd offered Veliry.

He couldn't remember Joey ever acting like that with anybody before. Sure he'd had awkward greetings before. But never THAT awkward.

He looked back for a moment, his face scrunched in thought.

"Oh buddy." He said to himself as he turned back to continue walking. "I hope not. That's the wrong tree to bark up. And she's older than you think."

He really hoped, for his brother's sake, that his suspicion was wrong.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xg3e69/wait_is_this_just_gate_228/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (227/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xefl85/wait_is_this_just_gate_226/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Veliry thought for a moment, still holding Joey's shirt in her hands, oblivious to how awkward Joey was feeling with someone new so close to him. Though he WAS incredibly distracted by the fact that the small redhead was floating nearly two feet off of the ground to do so.

Joey's hand shot out straight in front of him, brushing past Veliry's midsection, and positioned itself as if waiting for a handshake. Both James and Veliry stared at it confused.

"I'm Joseph Choi." He said loudly, though not quite yelling. "Pleased to meet you. Please call me Joey."

Then Joey looked at his own hand in shock. He drew it back in and offered it to Veliry more properly while looking at her face for a moment.

She shrugged and took the hand. "Nice to meet you Joey." She said with a smile. "Your brother says you are incredibly interested in magic."

Joey looked at her again with a beaming smile.

"Yes please." He said.

James looked on with a smile as he saw Joey peer around the room, completely forgetting the hand shake as he took in all the magical things around him.

He slowly crept out of the room. "Don't get him killed Vel." He said as he neared the door. "And don't turn him into a Bogaroe or Whoopy Frog or something." He pointed a stern finger at his brother. "Don't get yourself blown up. Mom'll kill you."

That snapped both of them out of their distracted examinations/greeting.

"What's a Bogaroe?" Joey asked curiously.

"What's a Whoopy Frog?" Veliry asked at the same moment, her face scrunched in confusion.

"What?" They both asked each other simultaneously.

"You heard me." He said as the animated door sealed behind him. "JOEY! DINNER'S AT SEVEN!" He yelled over his shoulder.

He walked away happy to know that both of the two super nerds were going to have their fill of questions and answers for the next few hours. Though he did kind of doubt that Joey would remember dinner.

Then he thought of the awkward, even by Joey's standards, greeting he'd offered Veliry.

He couldn't remember Joey ever acting like that with anybody before. Sure he'd had awkward greetings before. But never THAT awkward.

He looked back for a moment, his face scrunched in thought.

"Oh buddy." He said to himself as he turned back to continue walking. "I hope not. That's the wrong tree to bark up. And she's older than you think."

He really hoped, for his brother's sake, that his suspicion was wrong.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xg3cg0/wait_is_this_just_gate_228/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (226/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xdif92/wait_is_this_just_gate_225/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xf81m5/wait_is_this_just_gate_227/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xdidoy/wait_is_this_just_gate_225/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (225/?)

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Writer's note: Aaaaw, brotherly love. AND MOTHERLY DISDAIN!!!

Enjoy.

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"So yeah." James said as he and Amina approached the door to his family's temporary room. "Vickers is on our side. At least for now."

"How'd he take the rest of it?" She asked as he neared the door.

"Well. I wish I'd saved the recording a bit longer. I coulda shown him. But he understood. He's working with that Royal Guardian or whatever she's called. The massive elf woman?" James said, gesturing with his hand to indicate someone taller than him.

"Ira'Nyl?" Amina said.

"That's the one. He's helping her play test some of Veliry's new rifles." James said before stepping up to the door and rapping on it with his knuckles. "I think he wants her to build a custom one for him."

A moment later the door opened and Joey greeted them with wide eyed wonder.

"\[Wooooooaaaaahhh\]!" He said in one long breath.

James looked at Amina. "Told you he'd love the armor." He said with a grin.

Both of them were, per James's insistance, wearing their full battle gear and weapons. James in the dark colored combination of light plate armor and riding leathers that matched his drake Steve, and Amina in her full, red themed, General's uniform.

"\[Oh my god!\]" James's mother said as she emerged beside her younger son to see the arrivals. "\[I thought we were going shopping. Not fighting the dark lord of Mordor or something!\]"

James laughed and lifted his arm as Joey circled around him, inspecting his gear. "\[Relax mom. I just figured I'd show of for Jojo-OW!\]" He yelped. "\[Don't pull that strap Joey!\]" He scolded his younger brother.

"\[Sorry.\]" Joey said with a hint of mischief.

"\[James, you almost forgot the thing.\]" Amina said, gesturing at his bag.

James looked, confused for a moment, then remembered. "\[Oh. Right.\]"

He rummaged in his bottomless bag, sinking his longer left arm almost up to the shoulder in it, much to his little brother's delite, and retrieved to small green medallions. They were like miniature versions of the one he'd been given when he first arrived, though they had a small red shield painted around the central symbols. He held one out to his mother, and one to Joey.

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Navarro nodded slowly.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xckgcn/wait_is_this_just_gate_224/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Aaaaw, brotherly love. AND MOTHERLY DISDAIN!!!

Enjoy.

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"So yeah." James said as he and Amina approached the door to his family's temporary room. "Vickers is on our side. At least for now."

"How'd he take the rest of it?" She asked as he neared the door.

"Well. I wish I'd saved the recording a bit longer. I coulda shown him. But he understood. He's working with that Royal Guardian or whatever she's called. The massive elf woman?" James said, gesturing with his hand to indicate someone taller than him.

"Ira'Nyl?" Amina said.

"That's the one. He's helping her play test some of Veliry's new rifles." James said before stepping up to the door and rapping on it with his knuckles. "I think he wants her to build a custom one for him."

A moment later the door opened and Joey greeted them with wide eyed wonder.

"\[Wooooooaaaaahhh\]!" He said in one long breath.

James looked at Amina. "Told you he'd love the armor." He said with a grin.

Both of them were, per James's insistance, wearing their full battle gear and weapons. James in the dark colored combination of light plate armor and riding leathers that matched his drake Steve, and Amina in her full, red themed, General's uniform.

"\[Oh my god!\]" James's mother said as she emerged beside her younger son to see the arrivals. "\[I thought we were going shopping. Not fighting the dark lord of Mordor or something!\]"

James laughed and lifted his arm as Joey circled around him, inspecting his gear. "\[Relax mom. I just figured I'd show off for Jojo-OW!\]" He yelped. "\[Don't pull that strap Joey!\]" He scolded his younger brother.

"\[Sorry.\]" Joey said with a hint of mischief.

"\[James, you almost forgot the thing.\]" Amina said, gesturing at his bag.

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Dranek had known starvation before.

He'd grown up in the streets as an orphan, fighting for every scrap he could find. Then he'd become an outcast of his own people and life had become difficult again. And being a Ranger occasionally meant living off the land in lands that didn't care for the living.

But this starvation was different.

His body was physically nourished. In fact the food here, though bland and mushy, was significantly more healthy for his body than the food back home. In fact if he weren't so obviously a prisoner he might just as to stay.

And yet, as healthy as his body felt, his soul felt on the brink of death. He lay on his undersized cot staring at the ceiling of the steel barred cell.

Goddess? What is happening to me? I feel as though I have no energy.

No answer arose for many minutes. He asked again.

Goddess? Please! Help me!

Finally, the lovely, soothing voice answered in his mind.

It is the magic of this world faithful Dranek. It is so weak. Your body is not used to having such a deficit.

Will I die of this? He asked.

There was another long pause. He was about to ask again when she answered.

Not on my watch. She replied. ***Not until it serves the purpose you have come here for. Worry not. Even as you speak myself and the other gods present are gifting this world what it lacks. Stay strong Dranek. You shall be delivered.***

He struggled through the headache that had become so ever present over the past few days.

Yes goddess. He thought back. *I shall.... serve.*

I know my child. Now perk up if you can manage. They are coming. And they bring the beginning of your salvation.

Sure enough the door opened. One of the "Doctors" walked in. Next to them was a heavily tattooed young human wearing a grey jump suit.

The young man was chained, much like Dranek was.

"Good afternoon Mr. Godsnose." The doctor said. "Are you feeling better today?"

Dranek turned his head slowly toward them, then achily lifted up until he was seated.

"Are you up for a little exercise today?" The doctor asked. He turned and gestured at the man in the jump suit. The man rolled his left sleeve up and held the exposed arm in front of Dranek.

Dranek looked at the arm, then at the "Doctor".

"What is this?" Dranek asked.

"Bite please." The doctor said with a smile.

All of Dranek's instincts and mental taboos kicked back into place.

He wanted to say no.

But then the goddesses assurances came to mind.

Slowly, and with his eyes still locked onto the "Doctor", Dranek opened his mouth. His silver teeth glinted in the uncomfortable white light of the room.

He bit down on the man's arms hard enough to sink the silver teeth in up to his gums.

"Fuck!" The man yelled in pain. "Not so hard ese."

"Silence Mr. Navarro." The doctor said sternly. "That's enough Mr. Godsnose." He paused. "Unless you know better of course."

Dranek quickly released his bite, savoring the taste of fresh blood as he did.

"It is enough for what you seek." He said solemnly.

He looked at the chained man, who was already doubling over in pain.

"Though. If you wish to live, you may wish to leave the room." He added.

The "Doctor" looked down at Navarro, whose veins were blackening and making popping noises.

"FUCK!" Navarro yelled as the flesh near his wrist tore from the formation of new muscles, drenching the floor in blood even as skin rapidly formed over the damage and sprouted dark black fur. "WHAT THE FUCK?!?!"

The "Doctor" ran from the room, slamming it shut before appearing in the small window there.

With as little magic as there is here. The goddess chimed in. ***This may get.... messy.***

Dranek grabbed his pillow from the bed and tore a sheet of cloth off of it. He wrapped the cloth around the silver lined chains holding his ankles together, and broke the chains easily.

He was going to need mobility for what was coming.

He repeated the process for the chains between his hands as Navarro continued his initial transformation. Then tore another piece of cloth from the pillowcase. He took the length of chain that had been holding his ankles and, using the cloth pieces as a barrier, wrapped them around his knuckles.

"Watch closely." He said as he stood up, watching the continued bloodshed in front of him, and braced himself in the corner. "As a new pack forms."

Yes Dranek. Show them our ways.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xdif92/wait_is_this_just_gate_225/)

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His body was physically nourished. In fact the food here, though bland and mushy, was significantly more healthy for his body than the food back home. In fact if he weren't so obviously a prisoner he might just as to stay.

And yet, as healthy as his body felt, his soul felt on the brink of death. He lay on his undersized cot staring at the ceiling of the steel barred cell.

Goddess? What is happening to me? I feel as though I have no energy.

No answer arose for many minutes. He asked again.

Goddess? Please! Help me!

Finally, the lovely, soothing voice answered in his mind.

It is the magic of this world faithful Dranek. It is so weak. Your body is not used to having such a deficit.

Will I die of this? He asked.

There was another long pause. He was about to ask again when she answered.

Not on my watch. She replied. ***Not until it serves the purpose you have come here for. Worry not. Even as you speak myself and the other gods present are gifting this world what it lacks. Stay strong Dranek. You shall be delivered.***

He struggled through the headache that had become so ever present over the past few days.

Yes goddess. He thought back. *I shall.... serve.*

I know my child. Now perk up if you can manage. They are coming. And they bring the beginning of your salvation.

Sure enough the door opened. One of the "Doctors" walked in. Next to them was a heavily tattooed young human wearing a grey jump suit.

The young man was chained, much like Dranek was.

"Good afternoon Mr. Godsnose." The doctor said. "Are you feeling better today?"

Dranek turned his head slowly toward them, then achily lifted up until he was seated.

"Are you up for a little exercise today?" The doctor asked. He turned and gestured at the man in the jump suit. The man rolled his left sleeve up and held the exposed arm in front of Dranek.

Dranek looked at the arm, then at the "Doctor".

"What is this?" Dranek asked.

"Bite please." The doctor said with a smile.

All of Dranek's instincts and mental taboos kicked back into place.

He wanted to say no.

But then the goddesses assurances came to mind.

Slowly, and with his eyes still locked onto the "Doctor", Dranek opened his mouth. His silver teeth glinted in the uncomfortable white light of the room.

He bit down on the man's arms hard enough to sink the silver teeth in up to his gums.

"Fuck!" The man yelled in pain. "Not so hard ese."

"Silence Mr. Navarro." The doctor said sternly. "That's enough Mr. Godsnose." He paused. "Unless you know better of course."

Dranek quickly released his bite, savoring the taste of fresh blood as he did.

"It is enough for what you seek." He said solemnly.

He looked at the chained man, who was already doubling over in pain.

"Though. If you wish to live, you may wish to leave the room." He added.

The "Doctor" looked down at Navarro, whose veins were blackening and making popping noises.

"FUCK!" Navarro yelled as the flesh near his wrist tore from the formation of new muscles, drenching the floor in blood even as skin rapidly formed over the damage and sprouted dark black fur. "WHAT THE FUCK?!?!"

The "Doctor" ran from the room, slamming it shut before appearing in the small window there.

With as little magic as there is here. The goddess chimed in. ***This may get.... messy.***

Dranek grabbed his pillow from the bed and tore a sheet of cloth off of it. He wrapped the cloth around the silver lined chains holding his ankles together, and broke the chains easily.

He was going to need mobility for what was coming.

He repeated the process for the chains between his hands as Navarro continued his initial transformation. Then tore another piece of cloth from the pillowcase. He took the length of chain that had been holding his ankles and, using the cloth pieces as a barrier, wrapped them around his knuckles.

"Watch closely." He said as he stood up, watching the continued bloodshed in front of him, and braced himself in the corner. "As a new pack forms."

Yes Dranek. Show them our ways.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xdidoy/wait_is_this_just_gate_225/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (223/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x9acn5/wait_is_this_just_gate_222/)

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"I know." James said. "We.... need to move fast."

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"That'd be the perfect spot for our people to invade." He said. "Isolated. Surrounded by mountains. Inhospitable. And it'd take days for even the fastest messengers to get word to anywhere important." He nodded a little. "And with our water conservation technology, even a few hundred gallons would be enough to let an entire battalion be more or less self sufficient there. Anything else they needed could be sent through from Earth for the initial setup."

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James's jaw clenched at the mention of Batty's condition.

"He's.... alive... for now." James answered. "And I haven't checked with my mom or brother yet. I got this message and rushed here."

"I'm glad you did." King Farrick said absently as he began scrutinizing the map and the area around the desert. "Go see your family James. Make sure they're okay." He looked back at James. "Then we've all got a lot of work to do."

"Yes sir." James said as he turned to leave.

"And James." The King added, stopping him mid step.

"Sir?"

"Bring Amina and your family to my dining suite for dinner tonight. I'd like to meet them myself."

James nodded, and walked out the door.

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But none of them were hurt, much less dead.

Nguyen took a deep breath as he thought of what he was now dealing with. Then, with a wince, he lowered himself down next to the sealed body bag at his feet and opened it for a moment. On Earth he'd get in trouble for breaking the moisture seal. But he was, ostensibly, in charge here. And they had a goddam infinite water jug. So they could hang if they got mad about it.

Inside was the familiar face that had almost constantly annoyed him over the past year of their operation. Despite his gruesome death Sticky was still smiling.

Nguyen smiled, but it was a small, half, smile. Then he pulled the zipper back up and pressed the adhesive seal back in place.

Then he stood up and walked over to the pile of armor and weapons that had been salvaged from the Petravian soldiers. They'd sort through them and determine if any of them were worth keeping and studying. The rest would be repurposed as needed.

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He lifted it and was shocked to find that it couldn't have weighed more then a pound or two. He rotated it, gave it a quick shake. As he did the latter, the head of the hammer flared with a soft purple light for a moment and he felt the weight change. Curious, he lifted it up properly, marveling as it lightened again. He swung it slowly, as if pretending to bring it down on someone. On its downward swing the head flared and the hammer seemed to increase in weight. By the time it was finished with its arc it felt close to thirty pounds.

The reason for the enchantment was easy to understand.

He looked over at the bodies, one of which was the hammer's former owner. Then he looked back over at the Muck Marchers, laughing and carrying on even as his own people mourned and tried to process what had just happened.

Then he looked down at the hammer.

"I'm keeping this." he said softly to himself.

I might need it. He didn't say.

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James rubbed his belly as he and Amina walked his mother and Joey back to their room.

"Mijo. This place is amazing." His mother said. "And the King is so nice. And all these strange looking people." She placed a hand reassuringly on Amina's arm. "No offense dear." She said with a smile. "But what was that big greenish brown man that served our soup."

"Mom." Joey interjected in an odd reversal of their normal conversational roles. "That was obviously an orc."

"What's an orc?" She asked with a look of confusion.

"His name." Amina interrupted. "Is Sverry. He's actually a very skilled cook here in the castle." She turned and looked at James. "He loves cooking pizza by the way."

"That was him?" James asked. "Good. I'm glad the cooks are liking the pizza."

"James how do those bathtubs work?" Joey asked, completely changing the conversation on the spot. It was an old habit that He'd grown used to, even as Amina looked at him curiously. "Is that magic?"

"You mean the way they change shape and temperature perfectly EVERY TIME?" James asked with a grin.

"Yeah. That's just like those rich people jacuzzis that save settings. Also how does this place have running water? How is it so pure?"

"Answer is magic for both." James said. "Don't know how. Though, Veliry is supposed to be showing me how to enchant soon. Don't know when."

"That's so cool." Joey said. "Are you going to make a weapon, or some cool glowing armor?" Joey was getting so excited that he was actually walking faster than them now.

"It's.... a surprise." James said. "You'll see. Also... JoJo?"

Joey turned around, surprised to find himself almost ten feet ahead of them.

"Sorry." He said softly as he rushed back.

"All good bud." James said as he ruffled his little brothers head. "But we're back at the room."

"Come on Mijo." Their mother said. "Get changed for bed. I'm going to talk to your brother for a minute."

Joey quickly wrapped his arms around Amina before releasing just as quickly.

"Happy to meet you Amina." He looked away and around. "Officially."

"Likewise." She said in return.

Then Joey wrapped James in a similar, though slightly more lingering, hug.

"Love you Jamesy." He said. "So cool that you have magic."

"Love you too bud." James returned.

James's mom also hugged Amina. "I'm so excited to know that you two are getting married." She gave Amina's hair a light pinch with her fingers. Then looked at James. "Way prettier than you are mijo." She said with a light smack on the scarred side of his head.

"Thanks mom." He said.

"It's so nice to finally meet you in person Mrs. Choi." Amina added. "James I'll wait for you in our room." She said with a kiss on his cheek. as she turned to leave.

"I'll be there soon." He said. "Gotta talk to Vickers real quick first."

Then he and his mother were alone.

"You and your father both had a knack for landing women who are out of your league." She said with a smirk.

"Subtle mom." He said with a laugh as he hugged her tight. "Real subtle."

"I'm so glad to finally see you again mijo." She said. "I'm sorry about Batty. I only got to know him for about two hours. But he seemed nice."

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"How's he doing?"

"He's in a rough spot." James admitted as he and his mom continued hugging. "But he's not gonna bleed out or anything. Just a matter of whether he wakes up or not."

She leaned back and looked him in the eyes. "Faith mijo. Always faith."

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"I'm not talking about that James. I mean, have faith in your friend. I think he's tougher than he looks."

He nodded. But as his mother she could see the doubt still lingering there. The concern.

"How are you dear?" She asked.

James put on a smile, though even he didn't believe it.

"Stressed." He said. He looked past her at the door to her and Joey's room. "Confused. And more than a little scared."

"Of what?"

"Of the reason WHY you two were sent here." He said. "Plus some stuff that you probably DON'T want to know about."

"And why not?" She asked.

"Because if you knew what was going on here, you'd book the first tickets back home." He answered. "And there aint none of those available just now."

She slapped her hands onto his cheeks and pulled him down low enough that she could kiss his forehead, which she did. Then she wrapped her arm around him in a headlock.

"What did I tell you when we moved in with your uncle Junior and Aunt Linda?" She asked, giving his head a playful squeeze.

"That as long as we stayed together in our hearts we'd all be okay." He answered, muffled by her shirt.

"That's right. And now we're together."

He lifted her up, earning a squeek of surprise from his mother. She gripped his hand and flinched a little as she felt the claws and fur.

"Not used to that yet." She said as he set her back down.

James chuckled. "Me either." He said truthfully. "But it grows on you. Or me at least."

His mom sighed and threw her hands up as she opened the door to the room.

"Another thing you got from your father." She said. He looked at her curiously. "Terrible puns."

James smiled again, and this time it felt more real to him.

"Get some sleep mom. Tomorrow we'll work on getting you two set up somewhere a bit better. And I'll have Amina take you shopping for some clothes."

She turned and held his face in her hands again.

"You need rest to dear." She said. "Get some for a change."

"I will mom." He said, though he doubted it.

Then she walked into the room and shut the door behind her.

James pulled his phone out and pulled up his messages, clicking on Vickers' unread message once it was up.

>I'm in the chow hall. Where you at? What's going on?

James gulped as he typed a quick response.

"I really hope this doesn't become a fight." He said to himself.

But he had doubts about that too.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/xckihr/wait_is_this_just_gate_224/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (223/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x9aa37/wait_is_this_just_gate_222/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Edit: Just realized that some people might not notice. But the last section is, in fact, all in English. Remember, Amina is effectively fluent by now.

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"Of the reason WHY you two were sent here." He said. "Plus some stuff that you probably DON'T want to know about."

"And why not?" She asked.

"Because if you knew what was going on here, you'd book the first tickets back home." He answered. "And there aint none of those available just now."

She slapped her hands onto his cheeks and pulled him down low enough that she could kiss his forehead, which she did. Then she wrapped her arm around him in a headlock.

"What did I tell you when we moved in with your uncle Junior and Aunt Linda?" She asked, giving his head a playful squeeze.

"That as long as we stayed together in our hearts we'd all be okay." He answered, muffled by her shirt.

"That's right. And now we're together."

He lifted her up, earning a squeek of surprise from his mother. She gripped his hand and flinched a little as she felt the claws and fur.

"Not used to that yet." She said as he set her back down.

James chuckled. "Me either." He said truthfully. "But it grows on you. Or me at least."

His mom sighed and threw her hands up as she opened the door to the room.

"Another thing you got from your father." She said. He looked at her curiously. "Terrible puns."

James smiled again, and this time it felt more real to him.

"Get some sleep mom. Tomorrow we'll work on getting you two set up somewhere a bit better. And I'll have Amina take you shopping for some clothes."

She turned and held his face in her hands again.

"You need rest to dear." She said. "Get some for a change."

"I will mom." He said, though he doubted it.

Then she walked into the room and shut the door behind her.

James pulled his phone out and pulled up his messages, clicking on Vickers' unread message once it was up.

>I'm in the chow hall. Where you at? What's going on?

James gulped as he typed a quick response.

"I really hope this doesn't become a fight." He said to himself.

But he had doubts about that too.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/xckgcn/wait_is_this_just_gate_224/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (222/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x8c9y2/wait_is_this_just_gate_221/)

Writer's note: [See you space cowboy](https://youtu.be/u1UZHXB_r6g)

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"Yes sir." She repeated, understanding the thinly veiled threats to her career should she step out of line.

He nodded, then walked away, taking the guard with him as he did.

Leaving her alone with the news.

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He sat on the bed, rubbing at his still red eyes, and clicked on one that appeared to be a voice message.

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James waited as the General paused.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (221/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x49rz6/wait_is_this_just_gate_220/)

Writer's note: Yes I am still alive. I had a three day weekend because of Labor Day. Then I had a sick day because of a stomach bug.

Anyways, things progress. And no...>! Batty is not dead just yet.!< *So don't worry too much. (Maybe worry a little bit though)*

Enjoy.

\~

Nguyen watched, sore and bloody and sitting on top of a now dead horse, as the armored figure approached him.

He hadn't seen one of the near mythical special forces operators since he'd been a young Corporal in the Third back during the wars. Even then he hadn't truly believed what they were or what they were capable of.

Muck Marchers.

So named because their advanced, borderline indestructible, armor, as well as a few extreme surgical procedures, allowed them to walk on the bottom of the ocean to depths lower than most Submarines could go. Or at least most submarines back then. The suits had built in re-breathers, and advanced electrolysis devices that allowed them to get more oxygen on the fly while also supplying hydrogen to their built in fuel cells. A well maintained suit could allow its operator to walk from the continental United States to Europe so long as they were capable of stomaching the intake-based food pellets that the suit provided once its initial on board supplies were exhausted.

These suits had allowed the U.S. to turn the tide of the war in its favor during several of the lengthier engagements. Once the unfathomably expensive tech had been refined enough to be field ready it had allowed them to defend or attack virtually any site they'd wanted to. On the Ocean. On lakes. In rivers and tidal bays. Anywhere that the water covered was subject to a Muck Marcher action.

The fact that the suits being crush proof also made them resistant to anything short of anti armor weapons? Well, that just made the job even easier for the Muck Marchers.

These men... if they even were men anymore... were as close as the military had ever gotten to creating actual super soldiers in power armor. Though, he'd heard rumors about incredibly shortened lifespans.

The one approaching him now was also the first one he'd seen emerge from the door.

It removed its helmet, and Nguyen was surprised to find that the "man" inside was actually closer to a high school teenager. Or at least he looked like one.

He was also so pale that Nguyen couldn't help but wonder if the kid was sick with something. His veins showed through his skin, and his hair looked fried and almost limp.

"Master Sergeant Nguyen." The marcher said in a voice that was much deeper than Nguyen had expected. It reverberated oddly too. "Chief Marcus Driscoll." He said as he extended an armored hand. Nguyen accepted it hesitantly. "Fourth Salt Assault squad."

The chief pulled Nguyen to his feet as if he weighed nothing. Nguyen felt his already tired hand crackle a little bit from the chief's grip, but said nothing.

"Bit of a mess you guys made here." Driscoll said. "But it was bound to happen sooner or later."

Nguyen looked around at the massive amounts of bloodshed and carnage. He winced as he saw Sticky's legless body, with a spear still sticking out of his chest. The Orc who'd killed him was lying on on top of the young soldier, with several bullet holes in its chest and face. Sticky's last act of defiance before he'd died.

"Could say the same for you." Nguyen replied. "Why'd they send a bunch of Muck Marchers?"

Driscoll's face scowled for just the briefest of moments at the name. It was all Nguyen needed to see to know that he probably shouldn't call them that to their faces.

"There's been.... a slight change of hands on the other side." The youthful operator said, his mask of calm firmly reasserted. "Things are gonna be operating... a bit differently from here on out."

"Well I'd figured that last part." Nguyen replied. He looked around. "I suppose you can tell me the rest once we've recovered a bit and cleaned all this mess up."

Chief Driscoll smiled, and Nguyen was surprised to find that his teeth were eerily perfect. He suspected that they were fake.

"My thoughts exactly." He said. "Me and my boys will mop up any stragglers. You get your folks patched up and we'll go from there."

\-------------------------

James sat on the chair in the healing ward, numb to everything around him.

The healers had arrived only moments after Amina had placed her hand on his shoulder early this morning.

They'd quickly went to work doing what they could for Batty, but James and Amina both knew that his odds were all but non-existant. He'd been hit in the stomach by a shotgun round. At least that was what his mother's story had suggested, and the damage James had seen had pretty much confirmed it. James knew what one of those did, especially at close range.

Still. Somehow... Batty was alive. They were still working on him even as James watched.

He'd even run to the room where Vickers and Werner had ensured all their Earth-side supplies were being stored and gotten some medical gear from it. Once he'd returned he'd gone to work with his medical knowledge even as the healers had continued restoring the young Sergeant's damaged flesh.

He'd given batty a full two pints of his own O+ blood, making him light headed in the process, in the hopes that it might offset some of Batty's own blood loss. Batty was A+ so he knew that the compatibility would be fine, though he had worried about the magical content of his blood. He'd also worried about whether he might accidentally turn him to a werewolf by accident, as he had yet to test that concept. But batty had stayed the same.

Then he'd hooked up a set of IV's and pushed a bag of Hextend and a shot of general antibiotics just to be safe.

He'd also hooked up a field vitals monitor to Batty's hand and bicep. It beeped softly every few minutes as it printed out a small receipt roll of readouts that only James understood.

The healers had looked at him curiously as he'd added these new devices to Batty's bedside. But they knew that James was trained in Earth's way of medicine, and had allowed him to do so without any hassle. One of them had even commented on how their healing was proving more effective after he'd gotten some of James's blood. James had simply nodded.

Now he was sitting here, still covered in his friend's blood, watching as they continued to do their work.

Batty hadn't woken up yet.

James was doubtful that he would, though he still hoped.

The whole situation reminded him too much of how he'd arrived here with Sergeant Odie.

It was as the dawn faded into full daylight that Amina kneeled next to him, placing a hand on his shoulder softly.

He looked at her with red rimmed eyes as he placed a blood crusted hand on top of hers.

"How is he?" She asked.

James looked back. "Alive." He said. "Barely." He looked down, suddenly feeling the weight of all the stress and emotion. "I think... he's probably in a coma. Or at least something close."

"Is there anything else you can do for him?" She asked. "I see that you've done some of you work here."

James shook his head softly.

"Then come." She said as she placed her head against his. "I've got your mother and brother set up in a room down the hall from ours for now. But come clean up and get some rest. They're excited to see you again."

In the whirlwind of chaos that had occurred over the past few hours James hadn't forgotten that his family was here now. He still didn't know how or why. But he'd been so focused on not losing another friend that he'd completely blocked those concerns from his mind.

He nodded, still not saying anything.

She grabbed his head suddenly and turned him to look at her in the eyes.

"He's alive." She said. "That's better than EITHER of us expected before the healers got to him." She shook her head and saw the concern there. For Batty and, he knew, for him. "You've done what you can. Does any of that stuff you put up need upkeep or anything?"

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x9acn5/wait_is_this_just_gate_222/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (221/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x49q5g/wait_is_this_just_gate_220/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yes I am still alive. I had a three day weekend because of Labor Day. Then I had a sick day because of a stomach bug.

Anyways, things progress. And no... >!Batty is not dead just yet.!< *So don't worry too much. (Maybe worry a little bit though)*

Enjoy.

\~

Nguyen watched, sore and bloody and sitting on top of a now dead horse, as the armored figure approached him.

He hadn't seen one of the near mythical special forces operators since he'd been a young Corporal in the Third back during the wars. Even then he hadn't truly believed what they were or what they were capable of.

Muck Marchers.

So named because their advanced, borderline indestructible, armor, as well as a few extreme surgical procedures, allowed them to walk on the bottom of the ocean to depths lower than most Submarines could go. Or at least most submarines back then. The suits had built in re-breathers, and advanced electrolysis devices that allowed them to get more oxygen on the fly while also supplying hydrogen to their built in fuel cells. A well maintained suit could allow its operator to walk from the continental United States to Europe so long as they were capable of stomaching the intake-based food pellets that the suit provided once its initial on board supplies were exhausted.

These suits had allowed the U.S. to turn the tide of the war in its favor during several of the lengthier engagements. Once the unfathomably

expensive tech had been refined enough to be field ready it had allowed them to defend or attack virtually any site they'd wanted to. On the Ocean. On lakes. In rivers and tidal bays. Anywhere that the water covered was subject to a Muck Marcher action.

The fact that the suits being crush proof also made them resistant to anything short of anti armor weapons? Well, that just made the job even easier for the Muck Marchers.

These men... if they even were men anymore... were as close as the military had ever gotten to creating actual super soldiers in power armor. Though, he'd heard rumors about incredibly shortened lifespans.

The one approaching him now was also the first one he'd seen emerge from the door.

It removed its helmet, and Nguyen was surprised to find that the "man" inside was actually closer to a high school teenager. Or at least he looked like one.

He was also so pale that Nguyen couldn't help but wonder if the kid was sick with something. His veins showed through his skin, and his hair looked fried and almost limp.

"Master Sergeant Nguyen." The marcher said in a voice that was much deeper than Nguyen had expected. It reverberated oddly too. "Chief Marcus Driscoll." He said as he extended an armored hand. Nguyen accepted it hesitantly. "Fourth Salt Assault squad."

The chief pulled Nguyen to his feet as if he weighed nothing. Nguyen felt his already tired hand crackle a little bit from the chief's grip, but said nothing.

"Bit of a mess you guys made here." Driscoll said. "But it was bound to happen sooner or later."

Nguyen looked around at the massive amounts of bloodshed and carnage. He winced as he saw Sticky's legless body, with a spear still sticking out of his chest. The Orc who'd killed him was lying on on top of the young soldier, with several bullet holes in its chest and face. Sticky's last act of defiance before he'd died.

"Could say the same for you." Nguyen replied. "Why'd they send a bunch of Muck Marchers?"

Driscoll's face scowled for just the briefest of moments at the name. It was all Nguyen needed to see to know that he probably shouldn't call them that to their faces.

"There's been.... a slight change of hands on the other side." The youthful operator said, his mask of calm firmly reasserted. "Things are gonna be operating... a bit differently from here on out."

"Well I'd figured that last part." Nguyen replied. He looked around. "I suppose you can tell me the rest once we've recovered a bit and cleaned all this mess up."

Chief Driscoll smiled, and Nguyen was surprised to find that his teeth were eerily perfect. He suspected that they were fake.

"My thoughts exactly." He said. "Me and my boys will mop up any stragglers. You get your folks patched up and we'll go from there."

\-------------------------

James sat on the chair in the healing ward, numb to everything around him.

The healers had arrived only moments after Amina had placed her hand on his shoulder early this morning.

They'd quickly went to work doing what they could for Batty, but James and Amina both knew that his odds were all but non-existant. He'd been hit in the stomach by a shotgun round. At least that was what his mother's story had suggested, and the damage James had seen had pretty much confirmed it. James knew what one of those did, especially at close range.

Still. Somehow... Batty was alive. They were still working on him even as James watched.

He'd even run to the room where Vickers and Werner had ensured all their Earth-side supplies were being stored and gotten some medical gear from it. Once he'd returned he'd gone to work with his medical knowledge even as the healers had continued restoring the young Sergeant's damaged flesh.

He'd given batty a full two pints of his own O+ blood, making him light headed in the process, in the hopes that it might offset some of Batty's own blood loss. Batty was A+ so he knew that the compatibility would be fine, though he had worried about the magical content of his blood. He'd also worried about whether he might accidentally turn him to a werewolf by accident, as he had yet to test that concept. But batty had stayed the same.

Then he'd hooked up a set of IV's and pushed a bag of Hextend and a shot of general antibiotics just to be safe.

He'd also hooked up a field vitals monitor to Batty's hand and bicep. It beeped softly every few minutes as it printed out a small receipt roll of readouts that only James understood.

The healers had looked at him curiously as he'd added these new devices to Batty's bedside. But they knew that James was trained in Earth's way of medicine, and had allowed him to do so without any hassle. One of them had even commented on how their healing was proving more effective after he'd gotten some of James's blood. James had simply nodded.

Now he was sitting here, still covered in his friend's blood, watching as they continued to do their work.

Batty hadn't woken up yet.

James was doubtful that he would, though he still hoped.

The whole situation reminded him too much of how he'd arrived here with Sergeant Odie.

It was as the dawn faded into full daylight that Amina kneeled next to him, placing a hand on his shoulder softly.

He looked at her with red rimmed eyes as he placed a blood crusted hand on top of hers.

"How is he?" She asked.

James looked back. "Alive." He said. "Barely." He looked down, suddenly feeling the weight of all the stress and emotion. "I think... he's probably in a coma. Or at least something close."

"Is there anything else you can do for him?" She asked. "I see that you've done some of your work here."

James shook his head softly.

"Then come." She said as she placed her head against his. "I've got your mother and brother set up in a room down the hall from ours for now. But come clean up and get some rest. They're excited to see you again."

In the whirlwind of chaos that had occurred over the past few hours James hadn't forgotten that his family was here now. He still didn't know how or why. But he'd been so focused on not losing another friend that he'd completely blocked those concerns from his mind.

He nodded, still not saying anything.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (220/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x3kgq2/wait_is_this_just_gate_219/)

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Enjoy.

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Nguyen sat on his knees, hands tied behind his back, as the Petravian soldiers tore through the camp.

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The doctor and the other civilian staff had opted to stay, not wanting to risk the return trip. At Nguyen's and Sergeant Vhiner'ys instruction, they'd opened the hatches and climbed out of the top of the boxes they were in. He'd assured Vhiner'ys that they were actual civilians and not military like he and the other defenders.

But the Sergeant hadn't been willing to risk any further subterfuge, so he'd ordered them restrained and separated just like everyone else.

Nguyen couldn't blame him for that.

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And almost entirely at the orders of the Secretary of Defense back on Earth.

But he still had to admit that he was at fault too. He should have turned down those orders. They should have just gone about being actual Cartographers for the next few months to sell it. They should have never had more people or gear sent over.

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Right where the original door had opened before they'd set up the boxes.

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\----------

Krick looked back at the MP's as they made a show of inspecting the front, driver side, tire on the rig he'd just stepped out of.

He walked quickly over to the rear vehicle and steeled himself as he prepared for a conversation that he secretly hoped required him to get violent.

He took a deep breath and rubbed at his bruised rib before he gripped the door handle.

Alright you fuck. He thought as he pulled the door open. *Let's chat.*

His train of thought was interrupted by something clattering to the ground as the door opened. Reflexively he caught it and held it up where he could look at it.

Is that my pistol? He wondered, recognizing the white paint on the sights. He'd put it there himself after all.

There was blood on it. He noticed this just as he noticed the smell coming from the back of the armored vehicle.

"Ah." He said softly as he saw the bloodshed inside. The bullet riddled, dead, remains of former Secretary of Defense Grant. "Fuck."

He spun as fast as he could, instinctively flipping off the safety on the pistol as he did.

BANG!.... BA-BANG!

Krick felt the three rounds impact him in the chest and stomach. His armor was only rated to defend up to .45 caliber rounds. A trade off in exchange for it being light enough to be concealed.

But it had already been shot once, and was compromised as a result.

And these were much larger than .45's.

He looked down at the three holes in his abdomen as he fell to a knee. Blood was already soaking through his shirt.

He looked up at his attacker and saw the MP's from his truck aiming rifles at him. SSG Jones had smoke pouring out of his rifle's barrel.

He aimed the pistol at him. He saw the unworried expression on Jones and knew what was going to happen.

Click-Snap!

His weapon was empty.

"Fucking... bullshit." He said to himself as he fell over backwards.

Jones walked up to him and kicked kicked the General's leg. Then, just to make sure, put one more round in his neck.

He turned back to the other MP's. "Let the Colonel and Sergeant Major know that it's done." He said.

\----------

"Ah shit." Batty said quietly as they rounded the corner. "Their hand scanners won't pass us. Follow my lead. Mrs. Choi, act tired."

"Not a problem." She replied as she saw the two guards walking toward them. She yawned, and it wasn't a fake.

"Hey guys!" Batty said with a smile as they continued walking. "Patrol rounds?"

The larger of the two guards looked at them curiously. "Yeah." He looked at Margaret and Joey. "What are you doing here? Those are new arrival badges and we're prepped for transit. You're not supposed to be in this area."

"Ah shit." Batty said with a hand on his neck. "Are they doin that supply run right now?" He tssked and put on a look of upset. "My bad guys. I just picked them up down in Ontario. I figured I'd give em the world's quickest tour before we turn em in for the night. That's on me."

"Honestly I could skip." Joey said, surprising his mother. "I'm exhausted."

The two guards looked at them with pity. The smaller one sighed. "Fair enough. But we gotta log it. Badges please."

Batty pulled his off of his chest and signaled for them to follow suit. The two guards took them and held up scanners to read them.

Batty's badge went off just fine. But when the smaller guard read Joey's badge the scanner pinged red.

"Huh." Batty said. "Well. Jones at the front desk said that might happen for the first few days." He said with a thumb over his shoulder. "Need us to go back and get em redone?"

"Lemme try again." The guard said.

Then Margaret's badge pinged red too.

The larger of the guards began reaching for the radio handset on his shoulder.

"Sorry guys." Batty said, causing them both to pause as they looked at him

His hand flashed out with a taser, pressing it to the larger guard's neck. There was a quick crackled noise before it made contact. Then the guard was spasming as he fell back.

Batty's prosthetic leg swept up and kicked the smaller guard in the chest, causing a noise that reminded Margaret of the sound of wood being split as it impacted the guard's vest. The smaller guard went flying back into the wall hard enough to break one of the pipes running along it. Steam began pouring out of it.

"Shit. Too hard." Batty said. "Still getting used to this thing." He turned to them as he bent down and picked up the larger guard's badge. "Time to run." He said.

So that was what they did.

\---------------

"Is Sergeant Batista single?" Colonel Muhammed heard in her ear as she continued watching the control room get ready for a door opening. "If he is I might need to hit him up. He's a cool customer under pressure. Either way, the guards are ummm.... not an issue anymore. But things did just get complicated ma'am. You might want to open up that door soon."

"What happened?" She asked, moving her hand up to rub at her temple for a cover.

"He uh.... He took them out. They're making a dash for the finish line." The young sergeant on the other end responded. "Ah.... Shit. Looks like one of them was still conscious."

As if taking the line as a cue the lights in the room began strobing red.

"Intruder! Intruder! All personnel secure locations!" The automated voice said. Then a human voice cut on over the comms. "Three unidentified people seen in eastern conduit corridor. All available security respond."

"Get that shipment sent now!" She said to the control room staff. "Damn the last box. Get it gone!"

"But ma'am." One of the soldiers said from their station. "Security protocol demands that we cease all function until the security threat is eliminated."

"I said now soldier." She said with a glare. She looked around at the other staff, almost all of whom were looking at her curiously. "That's an order."

They hesitantly turned back to their stations. Though she could hear the murmuring.

"Status?" She said softly as she sat back down. Then she turned back. "Someone turn that damn announcement down!"

"Guards have rushed the gate room." A pause. "Wait. Where'd they go?"

Too many people were looking at her for her to respond. So she picked up her phone and pretended to call the security room.

"Security this is Colonel Muhammed." She said into the phone, ignoring the dial tone. "What's going on?" She said, angling her voice into the comm device.

"All good." She heard from the ear piece. "Somehow Batista knew about the decon rooms. Or he stumbled on one. They're in there getting into hazmat suits." She paused again. "Wow. The decon rooms don't lock their inner doors when a security warning is up. Thaaaat's a hole in the defenses." The colonel heard a frustrated sigh. "If it wasn't saving our asses right now I'd be mad about that."

On her computer the Colonel pulled up the command override screen.

\--------------------

"Alright." Batty said in a muffled voice as he flipped the on switch on his suit's air re-breather/inflation tank. He quickly turned on both Margaret's and Joey's too. "That should keep people from realizing we're the problem."

He gestured and they followed him. He got to the inner door and gripped the large red handle. He pulled and her heart skipped a bit as it didn't move. Then he grunted with a bit of exertion and the handle began moving noisily to its open position.

As they stepped in they saw the room on the other side. It was almost empty save for a few crates on dollies and the soldiers pushing them. Plus the guards posted around the room, looking at the doors on either side of the room. All of them were wearing similar suits to the three intruders.

"Halt!" One of them said as they saw the three of them emerge from the decontamination room. He had a shotgun aimed at Batty, who quickly put his hands in the air. "What are you doing here? We're in lockdown." He looked back behind them. "Do those not lock during a lockdown?" He asked with a look of disgust.

Batty pointed at the door they'd just come from. "We were already in there when it started. We figured it'd be safer in here with you guys."

The soldier raised their shotgun back up a bit to aim at Batty again. "Still. Who are you and why are you here. That's not a loading door so you aren't with the last shipment."

Batty pointed at Margaret and Joey. "New scientists. I was told to escort them here by Colonel M." He said.

The soldier considered this, clearly afraid to contradict the Colonel's orders if they were true.

Then one of the other room guards came over and tapped them on the shoulder. "That decon room is attached to the conduit corridor from the alert." She said to the first guard.

Suddenly two weapons were trained on them.

Margaret instinctively got in front of the one that was aimed at Joey's chest.

"On your knees!" The first soldier said as they gestured with the shotgun. "Now!"

Behind them a sparking circle began to form in the air.

"What the hell?" The second guard said, looking back at the opening doorway. "That's not due until the last crate gets here."

The first guard glanced over their shoulder for just a brief second.

But that was all batty needed.

\------------------------

James and Amina arrived in the summoning room just as an incredibly familiar face, inside of some kind of rubber suit, emerge from the sparking, swirling circle of energy that was hovering above the ground.

James rushed to embrace him.

"JOEY!" He yelled just as the two of them collided in a hug.

Then his mom stepped out of the circle.

"Mom!?!" He asked. "What's happening!?!?"

Then he saw the blood on her suit.

The two brothers rushed to make sure she was okay.

"It's not me." She said with a frantic look. "I'm okay. It's your friend Batista."

"What?" James asked as a third form fell from the circle and landed face down.

Blood quickly began to pool on the floor beneath it. The person began to claw at the rubber suit they were wearing, which wasn't inflated like his mom and brother's.

As the hood was removed James rushed over and cradlde the man in his arms as he turned him over.

He recognized the small capital H tattooed on the side of his neck.

"Batty?" He asked as he saw his old friend for the first time in almost two years. "Batty what the hell man?"

"Hey man." Batty said softly. "I tried telling them fools I wasn't crazy." He took a shuddering breath and James heard a gurgling noise.

"HEALERS!" He yelled at the people around him. Forgetting to speak in Petravian. "GET SOME HEALERS IN HERE!"

"I did think it was aliens though." Batty said weakly as James ripped open the rubbery suit he was wearing. "I was wrong about that part."

James pulled open the uniform shirt underneath, ignoring the blood that was pooled inside of the hazmat suit.

"GET ME A FUCKING HEALER!" He yelled again. "NOW!"

He tried to get his own healing magic going as he pressed his hand to the ruined mess that was his friend's stomach. But the amber light flickered dimly.

He couldn't focus.

"Amina help!" He begged, fear in his voice. She rushed over, snapped out of her confusion, and her hands both began glowing with the familiar light.

"I got your family for you homie." Batty said. His eyes were drooping. "Your lil bro's gotten tall as hell."

"Come on man." James begged as he held his friend's head in his lap. "Come on man. Don't do this. Not you too."

"Ah man Jimmy." Batty said. "You look cool as hell dude. All scarred and shit. What's up with your fuckin hand man?" He looked down at where Amina was frantically trying to heal him. "Is that fuckin' magic?"

Then James felt Batty's neck go limp, as the last little bit of strength left it.

"Aaaaay... Who's the smokesh-" Batty tried to say. But his voice trailed off.

"Batty?" James asked as he slapped at his friend's cheeks. Tears were flowing down his cheeks. "BATTY!"

But there was no answer. He saw Amina's hands go dark.

"Oh James." She said.

"BATTY!" He yelled before falling over his friend.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x8c9y2/wait_is_this_just_gate_221/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (220/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x3jsd2/wait_is_this_just_gate_219/) /
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Krick looked back at the MP's as they made a show of inspecting the front, driver side, tire on the rig he'd just stepped out of.

He walked quickly over to the rear vehicle and steeled himself as he prepared for a conversation that he secretly hoped required him to get violent.

He took a deep breath and rubbed at his bruised rib before he gripped the door handle.

Alright you fuck. He thought as he pulled the door open. *Let's chat.*

His train of thought was interrupted by something clattering to the ground as the door opened. Reflexively he caught it and held it up where he could look at it.

Is that my pistol? He wondered, recognizing the white paint on the sights. He'd put it there himself after all.

There was blood on it. He noticed this just as he noticed the smell coming from the back of the armored vehicle.

"Ah." He said softly as he saw the bloodshed inside. The bullet riddled, dead, remains of former Secretary of Defense Grant. "Fuck."

He spun as fast as he could, instinctively flipping off the safety on the pistol as he did.

BANG!.... BA-BANG!

Krick felt the three rounds impact him in the chest and stomach. His armor was only rated to defend up to .45 caliber rounds. A trade off in exchange for it being light enough to be concealed.

But it had already been shot once, and was compromised as a result.

And these were much larger than .45's.

He looked down at the three holes in his abdomen as he fell to a knee. Blood was already soaking through his shirt.

He looked up at his attacker and saw the MP's from his truck aiming rifles at him. SSG Jones had smoke pouring out of his rifle's barrel.

He aimed the pistol at him. He saw the unworried expression on Jones and knew what was going to happen.

Click-Snap!

His weapon was empty.

"Fucking... bullshit." He said to himself as he fell over backwards.

Jones walked up to him and kicked the General's leg. Then, just to make sure, put one more round in his neck.

He turned back to the other MP's. "Let the Colonel and Sergeant Major know that it's done." He said.

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"Ah shit." Batty said quietly as they rounded the corner. "Their hand scanners won't pass us. Follow my lead. Mrs. Choi, act tired."

"Not a problem." She replied as she saw the two guards walking toward them. She yawned, and it wasn't a fake.

"Hey guys!" Batty said with a smile as they continued walking. "Patrol rounds?"

The larger of the two guards looked at them curiously. "Yeah." He looked at Margaret and Joey. "What are you doing here? Those are new arrival badges and we're prepped for transit. You're not supposed to be in this area."

"Ah shit." Batty said with a hand on his neck. "Are they doin that supply run right now?" He tssked and put on a look of upset. "My bad guys. I just picked them up down in Ontario. I figured I'd give em the world's quickest tour before we turn em in for the night. That's on me."

"Honestly I could skip." Joey said, surprising his mother. "I'm exhausted."

The two guards looked at them with pity. The smaller one sighed. "Fair enough. But we gotta log it. Badges please."

Batty pulled his off of his chest and signaled for them to follow suit. The two guards took them and held up scanners to read them.

Batty's badge went off just fine. But when the smaller guard read Joey's badge the scanner pinged red.

"Huh." Batty said. "Well. Jones at the front desk said that might happen for the first few days." He said with a thumb over his shoulder. "Need us to go back and get em redone?"

"Lemme try again." The guard said.

Then Margaret's badge pinged red too.

The larger of the guards began reaching for the radio handset on his shoulder.

"Sorry guys." Batty said, causing them both to pause as they looked at him

His hand flashed out with a taser, pressing it to the larger guard's neck. There was a quick crackled noise before it made contact. Then the guard was spasming as he fell back.

Batty's prosthetic leg swept up and kicked the smaller guard in the chest, causing a noise that reminded Margaret of the sound of wood being split as it impacted the guard's vest. The smaller guard went flying back into the wall hard enough to break one of the pipes running along it. Steam began pouring out of it.

"Shit. Too hard." Batty said. "Still getting used to this thing." He turned to them as he bent down and picked up the larger guard's badge. "Time to run." He said.

So that was what they did.

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"Is Sergeant Batista single?" Colonel Muhammed heard in her ear as she continued watching the control room get ready for a door opening. "If he is I might need to hit him up. He's a cool customer under pressure. Either way, the guards are ummm.... not an issue anymore. But things did just get complicated ma'am. You might want to open up that door soon."

"What happened?" She asked, moving her hand up to rub at her temple for a cover.

"He uh.... He took them out. They're making a dash for the finish line." The young sergeant on the other end responded. "Ah.... Shit. Looks like one of them was still conscious."

As if taking the line as a cue the lights in the room began strobing red.

"Intruder! Intruder! All personnel secure locations!" The automated voice said. Then a human voice cut on over the comms. "Three unidentified people seen in eastern conduit corridor. All available security respond."

"Get that shipment sent now!" She said to the control room staff. "Damn the last box. Get it gone!"

"But ma'am." One of the soldiers said from their station. "Security protocol demands that we cease all function until the security threat is eliminated."

"I said now soldier." She said with a glare. She looked around at the other staff, almost all of whom were looking at her curiously. "That's an order."

They hesitantly turned back to their stations. Though she could hear the murmuring.

"Status?" She said softly as she sat back down. Then she turned back. "Someone turn that damn announcement down!"

"Guards have rushed the gate room." A pause. "Wait. Where'd they go?"

Too many people were looking at her for her to respond. So she picked up her phone and pretended to call the security room.

"Security this is Colonel Muhammed." She said into the phone, ignoring the dial tone. "What's going on?" She said, angling her voice into the comm device.

"All good." She heard from the ear piece. "Somehow Batista knew about the decon rooms. Or he stumbled on one. They're in there getting into hazmat suits." She paused again. "Wow. The decon rooms don't lock their inner doors when a security warning is up. Thaaaat's a hole in the defenses." The colonel heard a frustrated sigh. "If it wasn't saving our asses right now I'd be mad about that."

On her computer the Colonel pulled up the command override screen.

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"Alright." Batty said in a muffled voice as he flipped the on switch on his suit's air re-breather/inflation tank. He quickly turned on both Margaret's and Joey's too. "That should keep people from realizing we're the problem."

He gestured and they followed him. He got to the inner door and gripped the large red handle. He pulled and her heart skipped a bit as it didn't move. Then he grunted with a bit of exertion and the handle began moving noisily to its open position.

As they stepped in they saw the room on the other side. It was almost empty save for a few crates on dollies and the soldiers pushing them. Plus the guards posted around the room, looking at the doors on either side of the room. All of them were wearing similar suits to the three intruders.

"Halt!" One of them said as they saw the three of them emerge from the decontamination room. He had a shotgun aimed at Batty, who quickly put his hands in the air. "What are you doing here? We're in lockdown." He looked back behind them. "Do those not lock during a lockdown?" He asked with a look of disgust.

Batty pointed at the door they'd just come from. "We were already in there when it started. We figured it'd be safer in here with you guys."

The soldier raised their shotgun back up a bit to aim at Batty again. "Still. Who are you and why are you here. That's not a loading door so you aren't with the last shipment."

Batty pointed at Margaret and Joey. "New scientists. I was told to escort them here by Colonel M." He said.

The soldier considered this, clearly afraid to contradict the Colonel's orders if they were true.

Then one of the other room guards came over and tapped them on the shoulder. "That decon room is attached to the conduit corridor from the alert." She said to the first guard.

Suddenly two weapons were trained on them.

Margaret instinctively got in front of the one that was aimed at Joey's chest.

"On your knees!" The first soldier said as they gestured with the shotgun. "Now!"

Behind them a sparking circle began to form in the air.

"What the hell?" The second guard said, looking back at the opening doorway. "That's not due until the last crate gets here."

The first guard glanced over their shoulder for just a brief second.

But that was all Batty needed.

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James and Amina arrived in the summoning room just as an incredibly familiar face, inside of some kind of rubber suit, emerge from the sparking, swirling circle of energy that was hovering above the ground.

James rushed to embrace him.

"JOEY!" He yelled just as the two of them collided in a hug.

Then his mom stepped out of the circle.

"Mom!?!" He asked. "What's happening!?!?"

Then he saw the blood on her suit.

The two brothers rushed to make sure she was okay.

"It's not me." She said with a frantic look. "I'm okay. It's your friend Batista."

"What?" James asked as a third form fell from the circle and landed face down.

Blood quickly began to pool on the floor beneath it. The person began to claw at the rubber suit they were wearing, which wasn't inflated like his mom and brother's.

As the hood was removed James rushed over and cradled the man in his arms as he turned him over.

He recognized the small capital H tattooed on the side of his neck.

"Batty?" He asked as he saw his old friend for the first time in almost two years. "Batty what the hell man?"

"Hey man." Batty said softly. "I tried telling them fools I wasn't crazy." He took a shuddering breath and James heard a gurgling noise.

"HEALERS!" He yelled at the people around him. Forgetting to speak in Petravian. "GET SOME HEALERS IN HERE!"

"I did think it was aliens though." Batty said weakly as James ripped open the rubbery suit he was wearing. "I was wrong about that part."

James pulled open the uniform shirt underneath, ignoring the blood that was pooled inside of the hazmat suit.

"GET ME A FUCKING HEALER!" He yelled again. "NOW!"

He tried to get his own healing magic going as he pressed his hand to the ruined mess that was his friend's stomach. But the amber light flickered dimly.

He couldn't focus.

"Amina help!" He begged, fear in his voice. She rushed over, snapped out of her confusion, and her hands both began glowing with the familiar light.

"I got your family for you homie." Batty said. His eyes were drooping. "Your lil bro's gotten tall as hell."

"Come on man." James begged as he held his friend's head in his lap. "Come on man. Don't do this. Not you too."

"Ah man Jimmy." Batty said. "You look cool as hell dude. All scarred and shit. What's up with your fuckin hand man?" He looked down at where Amina was frantically trying to heal him. "Is that fuckin' magic?"

Then James felt Batty's neck go limp, as the last little bit of strength left it.

"Aaaaay... Who's the smokesh-" Batty tried to say. But his voice trailed off.

"Batty?" James asked as he slapped at his friend's cheeks. Tears were flowing down his cheeks. "BATTY!"

But there was no answer. He saw Amina's hands go dark.

"Oh James." She said.

"BATTY!" He yelled before falling over his friend.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x8c8dn/wait_is_this_just_gate_221/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (219/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x2nro9/wait_is_this_just_gate_218/)

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Enjoy.

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practically beaming. She'd told him that he needed to pretend like he was in one of the old Mission Impossible movies that he and his father both loved for some reason. He'd taken to it like it was a game.

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"So yeah. The drive from Ontario out here?" Batty was saying with a look of exhaustion that was a bit too convincing to be fake. "At three in the morning? Can't wait to go hit my bunk man."

"Yeah, I hear you there." The young soldier behind the desk said. "I hated the first few weeks on nights. But at least its quiet." He waved to Margaret and Joey, motioning them over. "Come on over guys. Just got a few things to sign before we green light your passes."

She walked over, with Joey close behind. Joey was smiling so she kept her face as stern as she could.

"Alright doc. Lemme see your badge, we'll get it authorized. It'll be limited for the first two weeks while we wait for all your checks and certs to clear. But you'll have standard access and access to the labs you need." She handed over her badge and motioned for Joey to do the same. "And while I scan these just go ahead and sign and date these for me." He gave them both clipboards. "You'll see where."

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"Thanksh." Joey said, lisping a bit from his retainer. "Have a good night."

Batty motioned for them to follow him, scanning his own badge on the main door to unlock it.

"Here." He said pointing at their badges. "Test em out real quick." They did, and sure enough the door chimed and unlocked for each of their badges. He gave a thumbs up to the soldier who smiled and nodded in return.

"Alright." He said once they were a few yards past the doors, and the guards posted on the other side. "Easy enough right?"

"I thought you were jusht a mechanic." Joey said in a whisper. "When the hell did you become a shecret agent too?"

"Shit foo." He replied testily. "I grew up in the Houston Port favelas. I've always been shady. Now come on." He said as he began walking a bit faster. "We gotta get to the door."

"What?" Margaret asked. "What door?"

Batty looked back at her with an expression of concern. "Don't worry about it." He said. "You'll see."

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"We've got the door room staffed almost entirely by our people. Minimal civilians." The young woman said in return. "Are we sure about this ma'am. I like Mrs. Choi. We'd be sending her into-"

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He'd likely be kept there for a night, maybe even two, as the higher ups (few as they were at his level) figured out what to do with both him and Grant.

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It was as these thoughts were running through his sleep deprived mind that the sat phone in the vehicles driver section went of.

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"It's the Colonel sir. It's for you." He said uncertainly.

Krick reached forward with both hands still tied together and cautiously took the phone.

"General Krick." He said into the receiver.

"General. It's Colonel Gene back here at the site." The familiar voice said back. "We've got a problem."

Krick took a deep breath. "Please tell me the Petravian is still alive." He said in a sigh.

"That's the problem sir." She said, a hint of worry evident in her typically calm voice. "We're scrambling all over this facility." She paused, and Krick knew what she was going to say before even hearing it. "We can't find him."

Krick held the phone out in both hands as if it had turned into a venomous snake. To himself he simply mouthed "FUCK!" silently.

He peeked over his shoulder at the vehicle behind him.

The one that Grant was in.

"Find him Colonel." He said as he pressed the phone back to his ear. "Find him. Don't let him or any of his werewolf.... stuff... get out in the wild. I'm gonna give this phone back to the guy in the front of the car. I'm gonna need you to convince him to give me a minute with the Secretary."

"I'll.... do what I can sir." She said back. He tapped the phone on the partition and SSG Jones reached back to take it.

A few moments later both of the vehicles slowed to a halt.

Staff Sergeant Jones got out of the vehicle and opened the rear doors, letting Krick out before undoing his restraints.

"Me and the boys are going to uh... check out this flat tire we seem to have gotten unexpectedly sir." He said. "Take a minute to stretch your legs, take a piss, do... whatever."

"Thank you sergeant." He said as he stretched his arms, wincing as his ribs reminded him of the bruise there. "I won't go far."

He began walking to the rear vehicle.

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James waited hesitantly as Amina came back to their room. She stopped when she saw him, sitting there with a tea set that already gone cold hours ago while he'd waited for her.

She awkwardly rushed past to her changing room.

He waited patiently. He had been doing so all day it felt like.

He hadn't even gone to see Vickers or Werner. He.... didn't really care for whatever spin they would try to put on this situation. He had more important issues to deal with.

After roughly ten minutes or so Amina emerged from the room and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Amina." He tried to start.

"I'm not..." She cut him off. "I'm not mad James. I'm sorry if I came off that way earlier. My father isn't either, for the record."

He nodded, biting his lip a bit as he did.

"It's just-" She began again.

"It feels like a betrayal." He said before she could. "And, even more so, it's disappointing."

She nodded slowly. "That's more or less what I was going to say." She agreed.

"Especially since I've been so good about everything else." He added. "It's worse because of all the OTHER stuff I've done here."

"Yes." She said softly.

"I know." He said, just as softly. "I'm sorry."

They sat like that for a while.

"I understand why." She said finally. "Like them or not. They're your people. You've given us fair warning in the past. But... I can't imagine what it's like to be in your position. You're in the middle of two nations.... two worlds."

James simply gave a small nod.

"I don't know how I'd act in that setting." She admitted. "It's a lot of pressure."

"Yeah." He agreed, head hanging a little.

There was another long silence that hung over them both.

James broke it first.

"I..." He began. "I forget sometimes... that this isn't my world." He looked down at his left hand. "Sometimes I say something... some reference from home... and you guys look at me like a weirdo and it reminds me that I'm not there anymore. Or I get a message from mom and Joey. Or see some new kind of person out and about." He looked at her and held up his hand. "And then you hold my hand. And it reminds me that this IS my home now. And.... I have to remember that too."

She was about to go over to him when the door banged three times.

"Choi!" The familiar voice of Vickers yelled. "Something's up in the summoning room! Come on!"

"What the fuck?" He asked as the two of them looked over, the seriousness of their conversation temporarily set aside.

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Despite his assurance that he would be fine from the Goddess, Dranek could not help but be more than a little concerned at his current situation.

For one thing, it was noisy in the metal contraption they'd moved him into. There was a loud whirring noise that he assumed came from the massive metal blades up above the thing as they'd moved him into it. The jostling up and down as it moved told him that he had to be in some kind of flying contraption. Though how it worked he couldn't fathom.

He was also strapped to the table again. Only this time they'd put a cover over it made of metal bars.

And he could smell the silver in both it, and the metal weapons that the two soldiers in the "room" of the vehicle with him. Plus a million chemicals and odors beside, including the piece of heavily salted meat that he assumed one of the people he'd scented in the front of the craft was eating.

They'd prepared this time.

He had to worry a little bit as the craft moved toward the sunrise that he could see outside of the small windows on the side, through the bars of his container.

Patience my child. The goddess whispered into his mind.

I know goddess. But these odds seem somewhat... stacked against me.

They have been since the moment you died dear Dranek. Have faith.

In a silver lined container, surrounded by silver armed guards, in some kind of flying death machine heading to who knew where, all he could do, was have faith.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x49rz6/wait_is_this_just_gate_220/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (219/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x2nkyv/wait_is_this_just_gate_218/) /
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"General. It's Colonel Gene back here at the site." The familiar voice said back. "We've got a problem."

Krick took a deep breath. "Please tell me the Petravian is still alive." He said in a sigh.

"That's the problem sir." She said, a hint of worry evident in her typically calm voice. "We're scrambling all over this facility." She paused, and Krick knew what she was going to say before even hearing it. "We can't find him."

Krick held the phone out in both hands as if it had turned into a venomous snake. To himself he simply mouthed "FUCK!" silently.

He peeked over his shoulder at the vehicle behind him.

The one that Grant was in.

"Find him Colonel." He said as he pressed the phone back to his ear. "Find him. Don't let him or any of his werewolf.... stuff... get out in the wild. I'm gonna give this phone back to the guy in the front of the car. I'm gonna need you to convince him to give me a minute with the Secretary."

"I'll.... do what I can sir." She said back. He tapped the phone on the partition and SSG Jones reached back to take it.

A few moments later both of the vehicles slowed to a halt.

Staff Sergeant Jones got out of the vehicle and opened the rear doors, letting Krick out before undoing his restraints.

"Me and the boys are going to uh... check out this flat tire we seem to have gotten unexpectedly sir." He said. "Take a minute to stretch your legs, take a piss, do... whatever."

"Thank you sergeant." He said as he stretched his arms, wincing as his ribs reminded him of the bruise there. "I won't go far."

He began walking to the rear vehicle.

\------------------

James waited hesitantly as Amina came back to their room. She stopped when she saw him, sitting there with a tea set that already gone cold hours ago while he'd waited for her.

She awkwardly rushed past to her changing room.

He waited patiently. He had been doing so all day it felt like.

He hadn't even gone to see Vickers or Werner. He.... didn't really care for whatever spin they would try to put on this situation. He had more important issues to deal with.

After roughly ten minutes or so Amina emerged from the room and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Amina." He tried to start.

"I'm not..." She cut him off. "I'm not mad James. I'm sorry if I came off that way earlier. My father isn't either, for the record."

He nodded, biting his lip a bit as he did.

"It's just-" She began again.

"It feels like a betrayal." He said before she could. "And, even more so, it's disappointing."

She nodded slowly. "That's more or less what I was going to say." She agreed.

"Especially since I've been so good about everything else." He added. "It's worse because of all the OTHER stuff I've done here."

"Yes." She said softly.

"I know." He said, just as softly. "I'm sorry."

They sat like that for a while.

"I understand why." She said finally. "Like them or not. They're your people. You've given us fair warning in the past. But... I can't imagine what it's like to be in your position. You're in the middle of two nations.... two worlds."

James simply gave a small nod.

"I don't know how I'd act in that setting." She admitted. "It's a lot of pressure."

"Yeah." He agreed, head hanging a little.

There was another long silence that hung over them both.

James broke it first.

"I..." He began. "I forget sometimes... that this isn't my world." He looked down at his left hand. "Sometimes I say something... some reference from home... and you guys look at me like a weirdo and it reminds me that I'm not there anymore. Or I get a message from mom and Joey. Or see some new kind of person out and about." He looked at her and held up his hand. "And then you hold my hand. And it reminds me that this IS my home now. And.... I have to remember that too."

She was about to go over to him when the door banged three times.

"Choi!" The familiar voice of Vickers yelled. "Something's up in the summoning room! Come on!"

"What the fuck?" He asked as the two of them looked over, the seriousness of their conversation temporarily set aside.

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Despite his assurance that he would be fine from the Goddess, Dranek could not help but be more than a little concerned at his current situation.

For one thing, it was noisy in the metal contraption they'd moved him into. There was a loud whirring noise that he assumed came from the massive metal blades up above the thing as they'd moved him into it. The jostling up and down as it moved told him that he had to be in some kind of flying contraption. Though how it worked he couldn't fathom.

He was also strapped to the table again. Only this time they'd put a cover over it made of metal bars.

And he could smell the silver in both it, and the metal weapons that the two soldiers in the "room" of the vehicle with him. Plus a million chemicals and odors beside, including the piece of heavily salted meat that he assumed one of the people he'd scented in the front of the craft was eating.

They'd prepared this time.

He had to worry a little bit as the craft moved toward the sunrise that he could see outside of the small windows on the side, through the bars of his container.

Patience my child. The goddess whispered into his mind.

I know goddess. But these odds seem somewhat... stacked against me.

They have been since the moment you died dear Dranek. Have faith.

In a silver lined container, surrounded by silver armed guards, in some kind of flying death machine heading to who knew where, all he could do, was have faith.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x49q5g/wait_is_this_just_gate_220/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (218/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x1v83e/wait_is_this_just_gate_217/)

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Behind him walked Comand Sergeant Major Herbert Vendermeyer and Colonel Patricia Gene. Behind them walked four of the base MP's, each carrying a rifle or shotgun. General Krick himself had a pistol on his hip.

He signaled to them as they neared the door and they stopped. He pulled out his phone and pulled up the message he'd already prepared for Colonel Muhammed.

>Everything must go.

Then he hit send.

He stepped into the room to see Secretary Grant standing in the middle of the control room. The room was filled with technicians, soldiers, airmen, sailors, and even a few marines. There were also the two guards that were standard for the room to have, each of them posted up behind the Secretary with their weapons already in hand.

"General." Grant said with a smile. "Didn't expect you so soon."

"Where is he?" Krick asked, ignoring the games.

"Where's who?" Grant shot back.

"Don't fuck around Grant." The General replied through a clenched jaw. He longed for one of his smokes. "Where is the Petravian prisoner."

"That's SECRETARY Grant... General."

"Not for long." Krick retorted. "I've spoken with the other Generals, and the Secretary of State." He turned to look at the other people in the room. "And... the President himself."

Grant's otherwise happy facade slipped a bit.

"Did you now?" He asked.

"Oh yes." Krick replied. "We had a little virtual meeting this morning while I was flying. And it would SEEM!" He yelled so everyone would hear. "That they were unaware.... of the abduction and abuse of a man.... more or less... who is a citizen of what is functionally an allied nation."

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BANG!

General Krick staggered back against the wall as everyone else in the room instinctively ducked. The General looked shocked as he clamped his hand to his chest.

In Grant's hand was a pistol with a smoking barrel.

"Stand down soldiers!" Grant said over his shoulder to the two guards, who'd quickly moved to cover and had their rifles aimed at the secretary.

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"PUT THE WEAPON DOWN SIR!" One of the guards demanded.

Grant slowly turned, pistol hanging by its trigger guard.

"RELAX!" He exclaimed as he turned. The doors next to Krick opened quickly as the MP's he'd brought with him rushed in, weapons aimed at the Secretary. The two room guards aimed at them momentarily before seeing the MP sleeves on their uniforms. Behind them the CSM and Colonel both peered cautiously around the door edge.

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"Well than it's a lucky thing that none of those are here." Krick said as he stood back up to his full height. Grant turned to look at him, eyes wide. "And that you're not actually Secretary of Defense any more."

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"I wasn't dumb enough not to wear a set of ballistic under armor to this. You fucking asshole." He said angrily to Grant. "But did you have to shoot my smokes too?" He gestured to the MP's. "Former Secretary of Defense Grant. You are hereby placed under arrest for violation of a standing political treaty with an allied nation, and the crimes

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"Oh." Grant began as the MP sergeant kicked the pistol away and grabbed Grant's arms. "Breaking quarantine? Really? Throwing that on the pile too?"

Krick ignored him as he turned to the other people in the room. "The rest of you are on base arrest until an investigation can determine culpability in these actions. Sorry guys." He said with genuine upset. "Can't bring down someone that high up without some collateral."

Then he turned to the remaining three MP's and held his hands out.

One of them stepped forward and positioned a set of zip-tie restraints around his wrists before tightening them.

I played my part in this bullshit too. He thought as he and Grant were lead out of the room. *And here I was hoping to get somewhere with these stars.*

He nodded to Colonel Gene as he passed her. "Take good care of our guest." He said simply. "We'll need him on our side if we're going to salvage our relationship with the Petravians."

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"All set here." Isaacs responded, the voice playing in the piercing he had in his upper ear.

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Sergeant Vhiner'ys stared at him dispassionately from behind his helmet's faceguard.

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Nguyen thought for a moment. Then he shrugged. "One of your men stopped by a few days back. Said he was heading back to town. Wouldn't say why though."

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He nodded, with a slightly confused look on his face. "Yeah? Why?"

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"Uuuuh... Boss?" He heard in his ear again.

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"What the hell is going on out there?" The doctor said. "What is that noise."

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Suddenly the sand beneath his feet shifted. Something sharp pressed into his back, just below the shoulder blade.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x3kgq2/wait_is_this_just_gate_219/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (218/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x1v6fw/wait_is_this_just_gate_217/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (217/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x0yshn/wait_is_this_just_gate_216/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Things get more complex. Haha. Awesome.

Enjoy.

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"Jojo wake up." Margaret Choi said as she gently jostled her younger son. "We have to go."

"Hmm?" He groaned as he stirred a bit. She shook him a bit harder, careful not to be too rough. "Whaaaaat?" He asked sleepily.

"Wake up mijo. We have to do something."

From downstairs she heard the repeated banging, followed by the people outside calling her name, muffled by the walls between the door and the second floor bedroom.

Slowly, Joey began to sit upright, rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he did. "What's going..... on?" He yawned.

"There's something going on with James." She said. From downstairs she heard the front door unlock. "We have to go."

"Mrs. DeLaRosa?" The deep voice called from downstairs.

"Who's that?" Joey asked.

"Mrs. Dela-RRRRGGHHH!" The person said before being cut off by some kind of popping noise.

"Who the fu-!" Another voice she hadn't heard asked before she heard what sounded like a punch, followed by a loud crashing noise.

"Mom? What's happening?" Joey asked, suddenly wide awake. "Who is that?"

"Something involving your brother and the other side." She said matter of factly. "Movie type spy stuff." She added, playing to Joey's way of thinking of things.

"What? Are they trying to mess with Jamesy?" He asked.

"I think so." She said. "Either way, I think the General was ready for something like this. Now get dressed we need to move. Three minutes okay Jojo?"

Joey nodded and immediately got up and grabbed his jeans from off the floor.

While he was dressing she went to the top of the stairs.

"Batty?" She whispered down. "Sergeant Batty?"

"Yeah. I'm good Mrs. Choi." He called up from below. He grunted. "Just moving these idiots into your bathroom."

"What happened?" She asked. "Everything okay?"

"Coupla MP's." He responded. "Tazed one, kicked the other through your broom closet. All good, gimme a few and I'll have em hogtied and out of the way."

"What did I get myself into?" She asked herself as she turned to check on her son.

Just as she did the door to Joey's room opened and he stepped out, wearing jeans, his dark blue hoodie, and carrying his backpack.

"What's that?" She asked. "We've got everything we need." She said, pointing to the duffel bag with the supplies and some clothes.

"It's just stuff for Jamesy." Joey said with a smile as he looked down the stares curiously. "Mostly ideas and things about his powers and Steve. Plus...." He whispered as he looked away. She thought that she might see him blushing if it weren't so dark. "I wrote a speech for his and Amina's wedding. I know we can't go there, but he said he'd put us on camera."

Margaret cradled her son's face in her hands and turned him to look at her. He looked her in the eye for just a second. But it was enough.

"He's going to love it mijo." She said with a smile. "No need to be ashamed of something that nice. Now let's go."

She led him downstairs just in time for Batty to emerge from the bathroom, sweat running down the side of his face.

"I am out of shape." He said to himself. Then he noticed them coming down the stairs. "Ah there's the Jo-Star!" He said, beaming with a smile.

"Batty?" Joey asked, recognizing him from a trip he'd taken to visit his brother during spring break years before. "Corporal Batista? What are you doing here?"

Batty smiled. "It's Sergeant now dude." He looked down, suddenly somber. "Well, former Sergeant anyways." He gestured for them to follow him. "Come on." He said as the smile returned. ""We got a long night ahead. I'll tell you what I can on the way."

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"I'm not speaking to you as a soldier right now. And definitely not a General." General Krick said on James's phone, which was propped up on the King's desk.

Amina stood with her back against the door, keeping it shut while also listening for any potential eavesdroppers. James sat opposite of the King with his head in his hands. On the screen the General was sitting in what James thought was probably his car, or at least a car. And he was wearing a simple dress shirt instead of his uniform. King Farrick was listening intently.

"In fact, telling you this might just get me shot for treason." The General continued. He took a deep breath, wiping his brow as he did. "Secretary Grant.... has abducted one of your people. He is one of your soldiers, and a werewolf." The General said as flatly as he could.

The King sat up straight, looming over the phone with a look that James had only ever seen on Drill Sergeants in training, and even then only when someone had fucked up with weapon safety.

"How has this happened?" He asked sternly. "How can he abduct someone when we have the summoning room guarded every second of every day?

General Krick winced and shook his head.

"He has.... a... tertiary site." The General said with great difficulty. "As in our THIRD site where we've managed to open doors to your world. The second one was how Vickers got through. Primarily as a test of our ability to do so independent of your summoning room and any lingering effects it may have."

King Farrick remained silent, simply cocking an eyebrow up in response.

"When Vickers gave up the goose we scrambled it." The General continued. "We had the team there go dark and relocate. But we already knew that we could open up doors of our own." He dipped his head. "They set up a camp and waited for the scheduled opening of a third door. Apparently it worked."

"You've known this the whole time? And you've kept it to yourself?" King Farrick asked.

General Krick nodded slowly. "We have." He admitted.

King Farrick looked up above the phone. "I was talking to Captain Choi." He said gravely.

James looked up at the King, only partly surprised at the statement.

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He heard the small , sharp, inhalation behind him. It was quiet, and he suspected hidden behind a hand. But he couldn't turn to face her.

"Who is it?" King Farrick asked, already moving past the uncomfortable subject. "Do you have a name?"

"Not yet." The General answered. "All I know is that apparently he has a brand and metal teeth."

"An outcast?" The King mused, hand on his chin. "In the royal army?... That at least narrows it down."

There was a long silence as the two leaders pondered their next steps. Their next words.

"I..." The General began, breaking the silence. "DON'T... want a war between our people." He admitted. "I never have. I.... have seen my people.... my military... at its worst." He shook his head. "I fought my way to the rank I'm at because I wanted to change this Army. To prevent

it from being the thing it was going forward. That's why I snagged this command from my compatriots when it came across my desk. I know that, given this new information, my word probably isn't worth much right now."

The King remained silent.

"But I am going to do what I can to prevent this from getting any worse than it already has." General Krick finished. He paused to rub his eyes for a moment. Then he looked up, past the camera on his own phone. "No guarantees I'll survive it though. My career definitely won't."

"I'll... keep all of that in mind." The King said slowly. "But if Grant is willing to go THAT far, then I fear things will have to get burned a little more before they forge proper steel."

The General considered the words. "We have a, somewhat, similar saying." His hand moved toward his camera. "Good luck sir... Captain Choi." He said before killing his connection.

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"In the future." The King said, also quietly. "Be a better man."

James just nodded again.

The King turned to look at Amina fully. "We have a lot of work ahead of us." He said. "Find out where this has occurred.

Amina nodded. Then she turned and stormed out of the door, leaving James where he was.

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"Isaacs you cleaned the spot it happened at right?" Nguyen asked as the two of them looked through the binoculars.

"Yeah." Isaacs responded, lowering his. "Threw a bunch of old meat trimmings from the kitchen all over it then mixxed the sand up real well and covered it. If anyone went looking it'd just look like the guy had found a spot and had dinner."

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On a dune nearly half a mile away the cohort of Petravian soldiers was marching toward them in formation. Not the rag tag mess of soldiers walking at a free pace that they'd been in when they'd passed through the first time, but an actual rank and file formation.

They'd been able to see the shields and swords at the front. The spears in the middle. And the archers and, what he assumed were, casters in the back.

Sergeant Vhiner'ys was leading them from the front.

He was wearing his helmet with the visor down.

"Tell the civ staff to get in the boxes that have a door." He said without looking at Isaacs. "Military personnel get armed and armored and take up positions in the tents. Keep covered until shit goes pear shaped."

"Got it." Isaacs said.

He was about to move to follow the command but Nguyen stooped him with a hand.

"Glasses on and keep that fifty aimed at the other wolf." He said. "He's your first target. Anyone using magic is next. Their sarge is third."

"Eyes in the sky style?" Isaacs asked. Nguyen nodded. "Roger." He said in response.

Nguyen turned to follow him back to the camp.

\----------

"Why are you so calm?" Doctor Regina Melendez asked.

"Will panicking help my situation?" Dranek asked in return. "I don't see how it could."

"Hmmm. I suppose not." She admitted. "Still. You're... well, let's be honest, a prisoner on a different world than the one you're accustomed to. That's stressful."

"It is." He agreed. "But I am confident in my escape. My survival."

"Why is that?" She asked. "Even now you're strapped to a chair and wearing a muzzle. Inside a glass room surrounded by guards. How can you be so confident?"

Dranek looked around, glad to finally be able to move his head a bit. He looked at the guards, four of them, arrayed around the glass and metal

box that he was in with the doctor, even if she was separated from him by another wall of glass herself.

She was something called a "\[Psychiatrist\]" though she'd explained that that simply meant that she was a doctor who specialized in healing the mind and emotions.

Dranek knew what she really was. She was the soft interrogator. And if he didn't work WITH her, then the next person they sent to ask questions wouldn't be so soft. They would be the one who dealt in pain.

And he doubted they would be a doctor too.

Dranek took a deep sniff of the air.

"For starters." He said as he looked back at her. "This glass won't stop me if these straps are ever loosed. Neither will the metal reinforcing it." He sniffed again for emphasis. "And none of your soldiers are properly equipped to stop me either."

"You're talking about silver?" She asked. "Your kind is what?.... Allergic to it?"

"That is the closest explanation to what it is for us." He admitted.

"Should we equip them with silver bullets than?" She asked.

"Are.... bullets.... the thing that your man on the other side used to kill me?" He countered. When she remained silent he simply nodded. "If so then I would be a fool to say anything other than 'Please don't'" He grinned. "For my sake."

"If silver is so bad for you than why is your mouth lined with it?" She asked, pointing at his grin with her pen.

The grin quickly disappeared. "I do not have this by my choice." He said coldly. "It is a mark of shame."\\

"For what?" She asked. "That seems a bit barbaric."

"In my case." He tilted his head so that the brand on his snout was more visible. "For accidentally turning someone."

"Is that a crime?" She asked.

"One of our worst." He said calmly. "In my case it was an accident. But it is still taboo. These mark me as a criminal and a danger to my kind." He shrugged. "As for it being barbaric. You are not wrong. It is a practice from our most ancient of traditions. But it was also set forth by our." He grinned a bit. "Goddess."

She wrote without looking as she considered this.

"Don't they hurt?" She asked after she was finished with the note.

"At first yes." He admitted. "And sometimes I catch my tongue or cheek in them. But... you get used to them. They do have their positives."

"They do?"

"Oh yes." He said. His grin spread again. "I don't lose fights to other werefolk anymore."

She thought about the implication. "You've... bitten other werewolves with them?"

"It is common for branded outcasts to be attacked. Especially by younger werefolk who are trying to prove themselves and earn a place in a pack." He said calmly. "Our goddess wanted us marked. But she also wanted us to LIVE with our guilt. The teeth help us defend ourselves from our own kind."

"That still seems a touch brutal to me." She said after a few moments of consideration.

"My world can be." He said. Then he looked down at the spot on his chest where he'd been shot. Then at the straps on his arms, waist, and legs. "But your world seems to match it. Albeit through more complicated means."

She nodded slowly. "That's fair." She said. "Your arrival here was quite rough. Tell me. I know you said you don't feel concerned about your captivity. But how do you feel about your situation?"

Dranek tried not to smile.

"Blessed." He said simply.

Wait, is this just GATE? (217/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x0yqex/wait_is_this_just_gate_216/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Things get more complex. Haha. Awesome.

Enjoy.

\~

"Jojo wake up." Margaret Choi said as she gently jostled her younger son. "We have to go."

"Hmm?" He groaned as he stirred a bit. She shook him a bit harder, careful not to be too rough. "Whaaaaat?" He asked sleepily.

"Wake up mijo. We have to do something."

From downstairs she heard the repeated banging, followed by the people outside calling her name, muffled by the walls between the door and the second floor bedroom.

Slowly, Joey began to sit upright, rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he did. "What's going..... on?" He yawned.

"There's something going on with James." She said. From downstairs she heard the front door unlock. "We have to go."

"Mrs. DeLaRosa?" The deep voice called from downstairs.

"Who's that?" Joey asked.

"Mrs. Dela-RRRRGGHHH!" The person said before being cut off by some kind of popping noise.

"Who the fu-!" Another voice she hadn't heard asked before she heard what sounded like a punch, followed by a loud crashing noise.

"Mom? What's happening?" Joey asked, suddenly wide awake. "Who is that?"

"Something involving your brother and the other side." She said matter of factly. "Movie type spy stuff." She added, playing to Joey's way of thinking of things.

"What? Are they trying to mess with Jamesy?" He asked.

"I think so." She said. "Either way, I think the General was ready for something like this. Now get dressed we need to move. Three minutes okay Jojo?"

Joey nodded and immediately got up and grabbed his jeans from off the floor.

While he was dressing she went to the top of the stairs.

"Batty?" She whispered down. "Sergeant Batty?"

"Yeah. I'm good Mrs. Choi." He called up from below. He grunted. "Just moving these idiots into your bathroom."

"What happened?" She asked. "Everything okay?"

"Coupla MP's." He responded. "Tazed one, kicked the other through your broom closet. All good, gimme a few and I'll have em hogtied and out of the way."

"What did I get myself into?" She asked herself as she turned to check on her son.

Just as she did the door to Joey's room opened and he stepped out, wearing jeans, his dark blue hoodie, and carrying his backpack.

"What's that?" She asked. "We've got everything we need." She said, pointing to the duffel bag with the supplies and some clothes.

"It's just stuff for Jamesy." Joey said with a smile as he looked down the stares curiously. "Mostly ideas and things about his powers and Steve. Plus...." He whispered as he looked away. She thought that she might see him blushing if it weren't so dark. "I wrote a speech for his and Amina's wedding. I know we can't go there, but he said he'd put us on camera."

Margaret cradled her son's face in her hands and turned him to look at her. He looked her in the eye for just a second. But it was enough.

"He's going to love it mijo." She said with a smile. "No need to be ashamed of something that nice. Now let's go."

She led him downstairs just in time for Batty to emerge from the bathroom, sweat running down the side of his face.

"I am out of shape." He said to himself. Then he noticed them coming down the stairs. "Ah there's the Jo-Star!" He said, beaming with a smile.

"Batty?" Joey asked, recognizing him from a trip he'd taken to visit his brother during spring break years before. "Corporal Batista? What are you doing here?"

Batty smiled. "It's Sergeant now dude." He looked down, suddenly somber. "Well, former Sergeant anyways." He gestured for them to follow him. "Come on." He said as the smile returned. ""We got a long night ahead. I'll tell you what I can on the way."

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"I'm not speaking to you as a soldier right now. And definitely not a General." General Krick said on James's phone, which was propped up on the King's desk.

Amina stood with her back against the door, keeping it shut while also listening for any potential eavesdroppers. James sat opposite of the King with his head in his hands. On the screen the General was sitting in what James thought was probably his car, or at least a car. And he was wearing a simple dress shirt instead of his uniform. King Farrick was listening intently.

"In fact, telling you this might just get me shot for treason." The General continued. He took a deep breath, wiping his brow as he did. "Secretary Grant.... has abducted one of your people. He is one of your soldiers, and a werewolf." The General said as flatly as he could.

The King sat up straight, looming over the phone with a look that James had only ever seen on Drill Sergeants in training, and even then only when someone had fucked up with weapon safety.

"How has this happened?" He asked sternly. "How can he abduct someone when we have the summoning room guarded every second of every day?

General Krick winced and shook his head.

"He has.... a... tertiary site." The General said with great difficulty. "As in our THIRD site where we've managed to open doors to your world. The second one was how Vickers got through. Primarily as a test of our ability to do so independent of your summoning room and any lingering effects it may have."

King Farrick remained silent, simply cocking an eyebrow up in response.

"When Vickers gave up the goose we scrambled it." The General continued. "We had the team there go dark and relocate. But we already knew that we could open up doors of our own." He dipped his head. "They set up a camp and waited for the scheduled opening of a third door. Apparently it worked."

"You've known this the whole time? And you've kept it to yourself?" King Farrick asked.

General Krick nodded slowly. "We have." He admitted.

King Farrick looked up above the phone. "I was talking to Captain Choi." He said gravely.

James looked up at the King, only partly surprised at the statement.

He could feel Amina's eyes burning into his back from where she was standing at the door.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x2nkyv/wait_is_this_just_gate_218/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (216/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wyjzs9/wait_is_this_just_gate_215/)

Writer's note: Stories and cars are startlingly similar. Old cars are easier to work on because they have less stuff to worry about. But they're super inefficient. New cars are super efficient, but they're also incredibly complicated.

This story has gotten significantly more difficult to keep up with even as the writer because, just like engine bays. THERE'S TOO MANY GODDAM MOVING PIECES AND THE ENGINEERS OF THE WHOLE THING (yes, I know that's me) DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FUCKING DOING!

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY GODDAM MOVING PA-

[*Catchy smooth jazz plays*](https://c.tenor.com/hK408lWFkjgAAAAM/standby-difficulty.gif)

Anyways. Yeah, a character from the first few chapters is back, and the plot continues to thicken.

Enjoy.

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James and Amina were out in the training yard with Veliry, testing her first iteration of a rifle, when James's phone went off. Amina and Veliry continued inspecting the new weapon as James stepped to the side to take a call.

The two woman didn't notice the agitated tone or gesturing as they continued the inspection. But they both turned when they heard James yell, "What the fuck sir?" into his phone. Then they noticed the look of concern on James's face.

A few minutes of watching him pace back and forth and James finally hung up. They'd set the rifle aside almost as soon as they'd realized what was happening.

James tossed the phone in his pocket and stood, eyes wide and hands up on his head as he stared off into the distance.

"What was that about?" Amina asked as she walked up to him.

James took a deep breath before answering. "We've got a big problem." He replied. He turned to look at her, his hands resting on her shoulder. "We need to go talk to your father. Somewhere private."

He looked over her shoulder at the concerned mage. "Vel, we'll have to continue this later."

"What's wrong?" Veliry asked in response.

James just shook his head as he and Amina practically ran from the clearing.

\-------------------------

Werner read the E-mail with mounting concern.

What the hell is he thinking? She wondered as she re-read it over and over. *That's going to fuck our diplomacy mission to hell and back.*

>First successful return trip has been accomplished.Subject was a Petravian werewolf.Subject's survival primarily due to regenerative capabilities.Tests taking place to determine feasibility long term.Tertiary site performing counter intelligence.Prepare for fallout should they fail.Delete this message once read.

She didn't really know what to think of the message. Covering for the tertiary site if they screwed up was NOT how a diplomat was supposed to work. They were basically warning her that she might become a prisoner if a bunch of grunts and scientists on the other side of the world didn't perform their job.

Why the fuck would Grant okay something like this? She thought as she hit the "Delete" button on her computer.

As if on cue Vickers opened her office door without knocking and quickly shut it behind him. When he turned around she could tell that he'd received a similar message.

"This is a problem." He said simply, confirming her suspicion.

"Yeah, no shit." She replied as she rubbed her temple.

"What are we gonna do?" He asked.

She looked at her computer, as if willing the message to come back, even though she hated it.

\--------------------------------

It was two in the morning when Margaret Choi was startled awake by someone shaking her in her bed.

"Wha?" She asked, half asleep. Then she jolted upright as she skidded back and away from the dark form that had been jostling her. "What the fuck!" She yelled into the darkness as she fell off the opposite side of the bed, bruising her butt in the process.

"SSSssshhh!" The dark figure said. "Mrs. Choi quiet."

She froze as she recognized that voice from somewhere. She peered over the bed at the intruder.

"Who the fuck are you?" She asked, gripping the side of the bed with one hand as she reached under the nightstand for her phone's charging cord.

Suddenly a flashlight lit up, illuminating the bed for a moment before angling up and at the intruder's face. With their other hand they pulled off the black cloth mask they were wearing.

"I'm Sergeant Batista. I'm a friend of Choi's." He reached across the bed with an extended hand. "But call me Batty." He said.

She knew this "Batty" though she'd never met him in person. Now that she realized who it was, the voice, and the face, matched some of the video messages James had sent back from times he'd been hanging out with his friends.

"Batty...." She said as the recognition clicked in. "You were one of the ones with James when the incident happened." She said.

Batty lifted his leg up, and used his off hand to pull up his pants a bit. Beneath was the latex and metal amalgamation common to military grade bio-prosthetics. The replacement that soldiers would get if they weren't comfortable with the portable regenerative pods that the military used for amputations.

"Got a souvenir for it too." He said. "Now, we have to hurry. Where's the supplies they gave you?" He asked.

As she walked, still deep in thought, over to the spot she'd hidden them in, a set of lights flashed through the windows.

Headlights.

Batty instinctively ducked down, and before Margaret knew what had happened, had a pistol in his hand.

"Shit." He said as she looked at him. He turned to her. "Get the stuff and get your son. Hurry up."

"What's happening?" She asked as she matched him in a crouch.

"Nothing good." He replied. "I was ordered to come get you and your son and make sure you had the supplies they'd given you. And I was told to expect interference."

"Interference from who?" She asked as she pulled the bag out of its cubby. "And who sent you?"

"Not allowed to say that stuff ma'am. Hell, I only KNOW the second part. G K. That's all I'm allowed to tell you." He said. "That everything?" She nodded. "Go get Joey. Be fast. Be quiet. I'll handle the rest."

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK! Someone pounded on the door. "Mrs DeLaRosa?" A deep voice asked.

Batty nodded at her and she quietly moved to the stairs going up.

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"Subject is a one, Dranek Godsnose." Dr. Donald Bringham said into his microphone. "Male Lycan slash werewolf. Of Human and Elven familial origin. Age approximately twenty nine when converted to Earth dating standards. Definitive features; seven foot two length, approximately three hundred twenty pounds, silver and black fur, brown bordering on gold eyes, heavily damaged left ear, some kind of brand on the skin around his snout. Last but not least, and counterintuitive to his species, steel capped teeth with silver points. Some kind of punishment for infecting someone."

Dranek stood/leaned where they had strapped him to a metal table that was being held at roughly forty five degrees. A series of tubes had been fed into both of his arms. His left arm was having blood drawn into bags

that smelled of an odd material. The other arm was attached to similar bags, but they held a yellowish fluid in them that was slowly being fed INTO his right arm, making it feel cold.

Most infuriatingly, he had a metal muzzle around his snout.

He also had a series of wires and tubes leading to patches that had been placed on shaved parts of his chest and forehead, and some kind of odd plastic cover over one of his middle fingers. A machine nearby beeped every so often. To him it smelled like a blacksmiths scrap pile plus more of that odd scent that the bags gave off.

He was fully restrained, chest, waist, arms and legs bound by thick straps made of an odd cloth. His head was strapped down in a similar fashion into a small indent in the table, preventing him from even moving it side to side. This was made worse by the fact that the back of his left ear was itchy.

His eyes moved to track the short, pudgy man as he moved back and forth speaking that odd language into the small device in his hand. Dranek would've thought he was a dwarf if his beard had been fuller and less pathetic.

He could smell just the faintest hint of flesh rot coming from the mans breath. He wondered if the man even knew he was dying.

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history?\]" He asked. Dranek attempted to tilt his head, confused at the wording of the question. "\[Any pack body problems that may dampen our learning of your body?\]"

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Dranek fought back the urge to smile. After years of being alone even when around others, it was nice to have someone he could rely upon.

Especially when that someone was your deity.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/x1v83e/wait_is_this_just_gate_217/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (216/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wyjxvn/wait_is_this_just_gate_215/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Stories and cars are startlingly similar. Old cars are easier to work on because they have less stuff to worry about. But they're super inefficient. New cars are super efficient, but they're also incredibly complicated.

This story has gotten significantly more difficult to keep up with even as the writer because, just like engine bays. THERE'S TOO MANY GODDAM MOVING PIECES AND THE ENGINEERS OF THE WHOLE THING (yes, I know that's me) DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FUCKING DOING!

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY GODDAM MOVING PA-

[*Catchy smooth jazz plays*](https://c.tenor.com/hK408lWFkjgAAAAM/standby-difficulty.gif)

Anyways. Yeah, a character from the first few chapters is back, and the plot continues to thicken.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina were out in the training yard with Veliry, testing her first iteration of a rifle, when James's phone went off. Amina and Veliry continued inspecting the new weapon as James stepped to the side to take a call.

The two woman didn't notice the agitated tone or gesturing as they continued the inspection. But they both turned when they heard James yell, "What the fuck sir?" into his phone. Then they noticed the look of concern on James's face.

A few minutes of watching him pace back and forth and James finally hung up. They'd set the rifle aside almost as soon as they'd realized what was happening.

James tossed the phone in his pocket and stood, eyes wide and hands up on his head as he stared off into the distance.

"What was that about?" Amina asked as she walked up to him.

James took a deep breath before answering. "We've got a big problem." He replied. He turned to look at her, his hands resting on her shoulder. "We need to go talk to your father. Somewhere private."

He looked over her shoulder at the concerned mage. "Vel, we'll have to continue this later."

"What's wrong?" Veliry asked in response.

James just shook his head as he and Amina practically ran from the clearing.

\-------------------------

Werner read the E-mail with mounting concern.

What the hell is he thinking? She wondered as she re-read it over and over. *That's going to fuck our diplomacy mission to hell and back.*

>First successful return trip has been accomplished.
>
>Subject was a Petravian werewolf.
>
>Subject's survival primarily due to regenerative capabilities.
>
>Tests taking place to determine feasibility long term.
>
>Tertiary site performing counter intelligence.
>
>Prepare for fallout should they fail.
>
>Delete this message once read.

She didn't really know what to think of the message. Covering for the tertiary site if they screwed up was NOT how a diplomat was supposed to work. They were basically warning her that she might become a prisoner if a bunch of grunts and scientists on the other side of the world didn't perform their job.

Why the fuck would Grant okay something like this? She thought as she hit the "Delete" button on her computer.

As if on cue Vickers opened her office door without knocking and quickly shut it behind him. When he turned around she could tell that he'd received a similar message.

"This is a problem." He said simply, confirming her suspicion.

"Yeah, no shit." She replied as she rubbed her temple.

"What are we gonna do?" He asked.

She looked at her computer, as if willing the message to come back, even though she hated it.

\------------------------------

It was two in the morning when Margaret Choi was startled awake by someone shaking her in her bed.

"Wha?" She asked, half asleep. Then she jolted upright as she skidded back and away from the dark form that had been jostling her. "What the fuck!" She yelled into the darkness as she fell off the opposite side of the bed, bruising her butt in the process.

"SSSsssshhh!" The dark figure said. "Mrs. Choi quiet."

She froze as she recognized that voice from somewhere. She peered over the bed at the intruder.

"Who the fuck are you?" She asked, gripping the side of the bed with one hand as she reached under the nightstand for her phone's charging cord.

Suddenly a flashlight lit up, illuminating the bed for a moment before angling up and at the intruder's face. With their other hand they pulled off the black cloth mask they were wearing.

"I'm Sergeant Batista. I'm a friend of Choi's." He reached across the bed with an extended hand. "But call me Batty." He said.

She knew this "Batty" though she'd never met him in person. Now that she realized who it was, the voice, and the face, matched some of the video messages James had sent back from times he'd been hanging out with his friends.

"Batty...." She said as the recognition clicked in. "You were one of the ones with James when the incident happened." She said.

Batty lifted his leg up, and used his off hand to pull up his pants a bit. Beneath was the latex and metal amalgamation common to military grade bio-prosthetics. The replacement that soldiers would get if they weren't comfortable with the portable regenerative pods that the military used for amputations.

"Got a souvenir for it too." He said. "Now, we have to hurry. Where's the supplies they gave you?" He asked.

As she walked, still deep in thought, over to the spot she'd hidden them in, a set of lights flashed through the windows.

Headlights.

Batty instinctively ducked down, and before Margaret knew what had happened, had a pistol in his hand.

"Shit." He said as she looked at him. He turned to her. "Get the stuff and get your son. Hurry up."

"What's happening?" She asked as she matched him in a crouch.

"Nothing good." He replied. "I was ordered to come get you and your son and make sure you had the supplies they'd given you. And I was told to expect interference."

"Interference from who?" She asked as she pulled the bag out of its cubby. "And who sent you?"

"Not allowed to say that stuff ma'am. Hell, I only KNOW the second part. G K. That's all I'm allowed to tell you." He said. "That everything?" She nodded. "Go get Joey. Be fast. Be quiet. I'll handle the rest."

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK! Someone pounded on the door. "Mrs DeLaRosa?" A deep voice asked.

Batty nodded at her and she quietly moved to the stairs going up.

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"Subject is a one, Dranek Godsnose." Dr. Donald Bringham said into his microphone. "Male Lycan slash werewolf. Of Human and Elven familial origin. Age approximately twenty nine when converted to Earth dating standards. Definitive features; seven foot two length, approximately three hundred twenty pounds, silver and black fur, brown bordering on gold eyes, heavily damaged left ear, some kind of brand on the skin around his snout. Last but not least, and counterintuitive to his species, steel capped teeth with silver points. Some kind of punishment for infecting someone."

Dranek stood/leaned where they had strapped him to a metal table that was being held at roughly forty five degrees. A series of tubes had been fed into both of his arms. His left arm was having blood drawn into bags that smelled of an odd material. The other arm was attached to similar bags, but they held a yellowish fluid in them that was slowly being fed INTO his right arm, making it feel cold.

Most infuriatingly, he had a metal muzzle around his snout.

He also had a series of wires and tubes leading to patches that had been placed on shaved parts of his chest and forehead, and some kind of odd plastic cover over one of his middle fingers. A machine nearby beeped every so often. To him it smelled like a blacksmiths scrap pile plus more of that odd scent that the bags gave off.

He was fully restrained, chest, waist, arms and legs bound by thick straps made of an odd cloth. His head was strapped down in a similar fashion into a small indent in the table, preventing him from even moving it side to side. This was made worse by the fact that the back of his left ear was itchy.

His eyes moved to track the short, pudgy man as he moved back and forth speaking that odd language into the small device in his hand. Dranek would've thought he was a dwarf if his beard had been fuller and less pathetic.

He could smell just the faintest hint of flesh rot coming from the mans breath. He wondered if the man even knew he was dying.

"BP is elevated compared to standard human. One ninety over one hundred. I would be concerned. But heart rate is slow. Only thirty to forty BPM. And pulse ox is reading close to one hundred percent. This last bit is odd since research points to our world having a LOWER oxygen content in its atmosphere than the other side. But we aren't exactly familiar with his physiology just yet. So it remains to be seen as to whether or not this is an issue, or just a quirk of being a werewolf."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/x1v6fw/wait_is_this_just_gate_217/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (215/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wxqnap/wait_is_this_just_gate_214/)

Writer''s note: "Everything's coming up Milhouse." -A certain someone at the end.

Enjoy.

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"You did WHAT?" General Krick said into his phone.

Colonel Muhammed watched with curiosity, having never seen the General so livid. His face was red and had a vein pulsing on its forehead. He had one of his smokes clenched, unlit, in a death grip between two fingers. His lower lip was sucked in as he absently chewed it while listening to whatever Secretary Grant was saying on the other side.

"No no no." Krick said with a stab of his finger at the unseen Grant. "You abducted a foreign nationa,l FROM OUR ALLIES, after KILLING him?" He paused for a second, the colonel could hear grant saying something in self defense as she looked on with wide eyes. "No no. You were supposed to be the one in charge of POLITICAL relations with the Petravians. IIIIIII.... was supposed to be the one running the military ops." The general stabbed his finger downward into his desk hard enough to hyper-xtended his middle finger a few degrees. "But you're over their FUCKING THIS WHOLE OP UP!" He practically yelled into his phone as he stood a bit. "AND NOW WE HAVE A WEREWOLF ON OUR PLANET FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY! AND IF THE PETRAVIANS FIND OUT IT'LL BE AN ACT OF WAR!!"

He slammed the phone down onto its receiver hard enough to send his pen holder and several of his challenge coins scattering across his desk as he hung up. His eyes were pressed shut as he clenched his jaw, thinking.

The Colonel stayed silent as he did.

"You got all that?" He asked softly after a few moments.

"Yes sir." She replied.

"Good." He said, looking up at her. His hand clenched his smoke into its fist, crushing it. Then he tossed it into his mouth and swallowed it like an oversized pill before fishing his other smokes out of his pocket. She fought to hide her disgust at the act. "Call the original secondary site. Ensure all operations there are shut down." He said as his eyes darted around, a habit he had when he was thinking of everything at once, she'd noticed. "I have to call the other stars and big wigs." He said more to himself than to her.

She took a deep breath. "Black friday?" She asked.

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"I think so." He said after a while.

"On it." She said as she turned to walk away.

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"Okay. So what is the purpose of this.... heated miniature fountain?" Veliry asked him curiously. "I'm supposed to be working on the rifle design right now.

"It's called a fondue fountain." James said in response as he pulled the.... hammer... on the unloaded rifle prototype back cautiously. "It's for the wedding feast. It'll blow peoples minds."

"And it melts and dispenses sauces?" She asked. "Why?"

"Just cheese and chocolate." James replied, glad that Petravus had chocolate of its own. "And then you dip stuff in the melted stuff and eat it. You know, finger foods and what not." He looked up with a look of awe on his face. "Or tacos." He said as if in awe.

"What's a taco?" She asked.

"I'll make some so the cooks know." He said. "ABSOLUTELY DELICIOUS!" He half yelled.

She looked at him curiously. "Ooookay?" She said as she looked back to her drawing board. "Well. This is a fairly easy thing to make." She stopped, tilting her head to the side for a moment. "And... actually... you have the magical skill necessary to make it. You just don't know how to enchant yet." She said as she turned around.

"Me?" He asked. "Nope."

She shrugged as she raised an eyebrow. "Wanna learn?" She asked curiously. "A warming spell based enchantment is an easy place to start."

James's head snapped to look at her with eyes wide. "You're finally gonna teach me to enchant things?" He said.

Veliry nodded.

"FUCK YEAH!" James said as both of his arms shot into the air in fists. He winced as the rifle he'd been holding clattered to the ground.

Veliry just stared at him, blinking rapidly. "I can't wait to see how this causes you to nearly die this time." She said sarcastically as he rushed to retrieve the dropped weapon. "Can't believe you're the one training our soldiers on how to use those." She said as she turned back to the design on the paper.

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Such a prideful name. It continued. **But than again, you didn't choose it for yourself. And it is a lovely nose.**

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Yes my child. It said. **Despite the vast distance, and the weakness of this world's moon. I am here. One of my children became lost and scared and hurt. And though they are an outcast, they are still mine to guide.**

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Bunch of bastards. He thought. *They'll learn otherwise.*

He sensed the goddess laughing. **And it is that very resilience that will prove so. You have died.** She admitted. **And under normal circumstances that would be permanent. This world has no gods of its own. No magic. And as I have already said, its moon is a joke.** She paused. **But they do not know that myself and several others of my kin have come here, via the very doorways they've been opening. And I need you.** She said.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wxqkup/wait_is_this_just_gate_214/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (214/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wwxfgv/wait_is_this_just_gate_213/)

Writer's note: Well now. That's just a dick move.

Enjoy.

\~

"So anyways, that's how the whole, 'magic from other body parts' thing works. At least for me." James said as he took the last bite of his breakfast pastry. "It's harder to control. And I mostly figured out using my mouth for it on accident."

"Make your feet your hands in your mind?" Vickers repeated incredulously. "That's the secret? That's all it takes?"

"I never said it made sense." James replied. "And quick reminder, I did blow myself up the first time I got it to go off."

"That's so fuckin' dumb." Vickers said as he stopped walking. "This the place?"

James looked up at the sign, startled at the fact that they'd arrived without him noticing.

"Yeah." He nodded. "Brimjaw's Tailor Shop. This place is great."

"Got the pictures?" Vickers asked. "Also, why not just have the people back home get you one?"

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"Hey, maybe we can get you some blue and black ninja robes." James said with a grin.

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"I'll shut up now." James said quietly.

"That'd be a nice change of pace." Vickers retorted. James nodded, then headed in.

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Everything from his neck to his waist hurt. And his head was pounding.

What the hells had happened to him.

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That was when he realized that his hands were bound.

"\[Holy shit it's actually alive!\]" Someone said in an unfamiliar language near his.... bed? "\[Go get top.\]"

"\[How the fuck do you survive a fifty to the sternum?\]" Another voice said.

Dranek craned his neck to look at the source of this voice, as it sounded familiar. But the room or, he suspected, tent was dark except for a single lantern shining on him directly.

"Where am I?" He asked, fighting not to cough up any more of what he suspected might have been his original lungs. Or maybe ribs. "What did you do to me?"

Dranek sniffed deeply, trying to scent whoever was in the room with him.

A hand flashed into view for just a moment, a container in its hand. It squeezed it and foul ammonia scented mist sprayed into his face, making his nostrils burn.

The intensity of the smell, so directly attacking his nose, forced Dranek to whimper in pain.

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He struggled against his bonds, trying to reach his nose. But the bindings, though narrow, were strong and tightly laced around his limbs and trunk.

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The hand shot out again, and Dranek snapped at it. But the moment he did it pulled back and sprayed the foul chemical into his face, most of it landing in his open mouth.

"\[Jesus Christ. That's enough Isaacs. We only have so much of that stuff. Plus that's fucked up.\]" A woman's voice said from somewhere in the shadows.

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Suddenly, the tent filled with light as the lantern's cover was removed and it was allowed to illuminate everything.

Standing next to it was the camp leader, Airix.

"So werewolves really can survive damn near anything." He said as he calmly pulled a chair in front of himself and sat on it backwards. "Hell of a trick."

For a moment, likely due to his recent return and abused nose, Dranek was confused by the statement. Then the implication of it sank in.

"You are.... from another world." Dranek said hesitantly. "From the hero's world?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." The man said in response. "We're just a cartography expedition."

"And I am a pretty little bird singing a song." Dranek countered sarcastically.

"Airix" stared at him with no hint of emotion.

"What were you doing sneaking around our camp?" He asked after a moment.

"I wanted some of that fancy, smeplie flavored tea." Dranek said with a chuckle.

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"You really are from another world than." Dranek said simply. "To not recognize the markings of a silver exile."

"So you're some kind of criminal then?"

"Since the day I was born. My mistake was simply not ensuring a kill." Dranek answered.

"Hmmm." The man said as he rested his hand on his chin. "I suddenly feel less bad about this."

"About what?" Dranek wondered with a silver grin. "Torturing me? I shall answer nothing. My comrades shall find me soon enough."

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Airix looked down at him curiously. "You're a ranger?" He asked.

Dranek nodded eagerly, hoping for any kind of thread of salvation to cling to.

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Then he grabbed the headboard of the bed and shoved Dranek into the glowing, crackling, sphere of alien energy.

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"You almost sounded like you enjoyed that." She said with a glare. "Good luck on your trip." She said mockingly. "You know damn well he's probably dead now."

Nguyen nodded. He wanted to tell her that he'd only made the joke because of how uncomfortable he himself was with the whole scenario. But something told him that she wouldn't believe him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (214/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wwxcib/wait_is_this_just_gate_213/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Well now. That's just a dick move.

Enjoy.

\~

"So anyways, that's how the whole, 'magic from other body parts' thing works. At least for me." James said as he took the last bite of his breakfast pastry. "It's harder to control. And I mostly figured out using my mouth for it on accident."

"Make your feet your hands in your mind?" Vickers repeated incredulously. "That's the secret? That's all it takes?"

"I never said it made sense." James replied. "And quick reminder, I did blow myself up the first time I got it to go off."

"That's so fuckin' dumb." Vickers said as he stopped walking. "This the place?"

James looked up at the sign, startled at the fact that they'd arrived without him noticing.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wyjxvn/wait_is_this_just_gate_215/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (213/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ww1mu8/wait_is_this_just_gate_212/)

Writer's note: The thot plickens. Wonder what kinda implications this is gonna have.

FIND OUT ON THE NEXT EPISODE OF GATEBALL-Z!!!!!

Enjoy.

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"Hey mom. Hey Joey." James said into the communication hub with a smile. Amina was sitting next to him with the Monte Cristo that James had made them both for breakfast. "I got good news.""

"It's so good to see you mijo." His mom said from the other side. "It's been so long since we got to talk to you. How are you? How was the trip?"

James nodded solemnly. "It was uh... It was good." He said. "Sad... definitely sad." He gave Amina's leg a squeeze under the table to keep a smile on her face. "Bit of a hiccup on the way back." He admitted. "But still a good trip."

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Amina looked at him, barely containing a grin. James blushed as he ran a finger through his hair to show her.

"After the last big fight... with the uh... fire monster." He began. "Some of the damage wasn't really able to be fixed a hundred percent." He said softly, suddenly feeling like when he'd been caught covered in hot cocoa powder as a child.

"MIJO!" She exclaimed. "I thought you said they had magical healing in this world! Miss Amina what happened to him?"

This time it was James's turn to look at her as she blushed.

"I...." She stammered. "I'm not one of the healers." She said. "And it was James's fault in the first place." She added while gesturing to him. "He was the one that caused it."

"What?!?" He said, startled at the turnaround.

"James Michael Choi!" His mom yelled. "You used to have such a handsome face." She said, exasperated. James peered at Joey, who was trying to keep a neutral face. But James could see the grin in his eyes any time they looked at the camera. "Now it looks like your grandma's tripas!"

"Mom I'm fine." He assured her. "They're just scars." He gestured back to Amina. "It's not like I need to worry about it ruining my prospects for marriage or anything."

"Actually I've been rethinking that now that you're all.... hideous." Amina said with a barely veiled grin before taking a bite of her half of the breakfast sandwich.

"What?" James asked, too startled by yet another surprise statement.

The rest of the conversation was a series of blushes and being laughed at for James.

But he still enjoyed talking to his family. Even when they were joking at his expense.

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Dranek slowly edged his way forward in the sand, keeping the edge of his camouflage cover pressed as low to the ground as he could while moving. It wasn't a perfect match for the sand, but night time was on his side, and he had dusted it and himself with the stuff just to be safe.

He paused every few yards to sniff at the air, careful to keep his noise level down as he did.

It had been nearly three days since he and the other soldiers had left the "Cartography" camp. Once the Sergeant had felt comfortable about the humans not thinking anything of them, he'd dispatched Dranek to do what he did best; sneak around and observe people that didn't want to be observed.

Dranek liked his job as a ranger.

It suited him well. He'd always been a tad sneaky. Perks of growing up in the Jadesport slums as the runt of his proverbial litter. The fact that he'd gotten branded and capped by the Lunar Council hadn't really

affected him too much. He'd never been one for packs anyways, wolves or not.

Plus, as much as the teeth, steel with silver points and magical reinforcement, occasionally caused him pain. He kind of liked how they looked.

And while they marked him as an exile amongst his own kind, they also lent him an advantage if he ever had to fight other werewolves.

Some thought that this was an oversight by the council, making outcasts deadlier against their own. But he knew differently.

Yes it was an advantage in a fight. But winning fights with other wolves meant living alone longer, as opposed to dying, and as a result spiraling deeper into exile.

But.... He'd done the smart thing. He'd joined the army.

The royal army didn't care about your past, or affiliations. Long as you weren't a rapist, murderer, or foreign spy, you could join. Might never make it very high up the ranks without risking your life. But to Dranek, ranger was just fine. He liked the solitude. And being in the deep woods scouting was vastly superior to drinking himself to death, not that that was possible for a werewolf, in the gutters of some city, getting pissed on by every young moon changer who wanted to prove they were tough.

Plus, he got to help on missions like this one.

He looked down at the camp below, careful to keep the edge of his camouflage cover even with the top ridge of the dune he peered over. He watched eagerly with his wide, darkness piercing eyes as the "Cartographers" moved about below.

None of them were trekking out into the desert, which was fair given the time of night.

But also, as he thought of it, why were they even up at this time of night?

He peered up, angling ever so slightly to look up at the moon. It hadn't even hit the rings yet, but it was close. Why were any of them even awake? Save a guard or two they should have all been asleep.

Instead the camp was actually startlingly busy.

Yet Dranek smelled no ink and parchment, he sensed no impressive magical energies, none of the leather and glue of book bindings being stretched and pressed. He only smelled sweat and....

That was it. He smelled that OTHER smell. The odd, chemical scent that he couldn't comprehend.

And where before it had been faint, as if hidden. Now it seemed to come to him more strongly, and seemed to emanate from a good number of the people below, some more strongly than others.

Dranek wondered at the smell. While it was strange, and incredibly strong, he thought he could scent faint undertones that were at least familiar. Granted, most of them were smells that couldn't be found outside of a smithy or an alchemists shop. But there was still depth to the scent.

His hackles rose unexpectedly as the wind shifted suddenly, his lips curling back in a subconscious snarl before his mind had even processed the change.

That unknown smell was suddenly coming from behind him, and very close.

The ranger quickly rolled over onto his back as he tore the light tan cloak from off his back.

He launche to his feet, ready to engage when he saw a man in the cartographers guild colors standing some twenty yards away.

He had some kind of odd, insect-like, glasses over his eyes, and had a long metal device in his hands that Dranek knew would reek of the odd smell if he got closer, or if the wind shifted again. It had a long tube on top that reminded him of some of the looking glasses that he'd had over the years. But its lens was massive.

Dranek saw a small puff of sparks emerge from the end of the device closest to him.

Something punched him in the chest like a war hammer, completely ignoring his leather armor. He suddenly couldn't breath. The report from it arrived only a fraction of a second later.

POP!

That sound was the last thing he heard before dying. He had a moment to think. *That's the smell.* Before he was on the ground.

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Isaacs pulled the bolt back on the massive rifle as he slowly stepped forward. A small netted bag caught the nickel plated shell casing as it silently ejected. Then he silently slid the bolt back forward. He silently thanked himself for having the foresight to request the suppressed variant of his rifle's barrel a week before.

Isaacs didn't take the cross-hairs off of the downed werewolf. He knew from the intel gathered at the capital that it wasn't dead, and he hadn't intended to kill it either. It was just.... waiting to respawn.

At least that was the closest comparison the chief security officer could draw.

His off hand quickly pulled his jackets top button closer to his mouth for a second.

"Intruder down." He said as he walked forward. "Securing."

Isaacs had no doubt that under more even engagement conditions the wolf would have successfully snuck up on them. Maybe even infiltrated the camp to a limited extent.

It was dead silent in its movement. In fact, Isaacs had seen parallels between how it had been crawling and how he'd been trained to move in sniper school. Plus its cloak, while not perfect, was still damn good at keeping it hidden in the sand. But part of sniper school was also learning how to spot enemy snipers.

But Isaacs' glasses had made easy sport of the poor opponent, showing its thermal signature like a beacon in the cool sand. Plus they'd been warned by the motion sensors on top of the tents, hidden in the poles that held each of them up.

Everything after that had simply been keeping himself further downwind than the wolf, and keeping the rifle hidden in the bottomless bag that he'd picked up while in town with the doctor waiting on their sick comrade's recovery from pneumonia.

Luckily it had done the trick. He hadn't needed to get as close as he had, the rifle was accurate enough that he could have shot the wolf at any time he wanted. But he needed to see just how good the bag did at keeping it concealed. And it turned out that the answer was; quite.

As he got closer to the wolf he tilted the rifle at a forty five degree angle, using the reflex sights on the side. Not that he needed them at this range.

He kicked the downed wolf's leg, celebrating to himself at it's lack of reaction. He slung the rifle over his shoulder, but drew the short sword he'd taken to carrying in this world.

He wasn't sure how to check a pulse on a werewolf, so instead he pressed the cold blade to its snout, checking to see if its breath clouded the shined steel. After nearly a minute of waiting he was satisfied. He quickly pulled out a length of paracord and began rapidly tying up the, temporarily dead, werewolf.

Can this thing really come back from this kind of damage? He wondered as he turned it over to roll it onto its own cloak. The cloak quickly soaked with blood. *Damn thing has a hole the size of a baseball in its back.*

He scanned the dunes around him, cycling his glasses through their various modes as he did. Then began dragging the massive werewolf to camp, kicking fresh sand over the blood stained trail before he did. He'd have to come back later and really cover up.

But even his glasses couldn't pick up Danil's presence.

The old dwarf had used his sand control magic to tunnel his way under the dunes, following the ranger, more out of curiosity than anything else.

He hadn't expected murder. Much less one so brutally efficient.

Once he'd seen the man from the camp panning around he'd quickly retracted his observation tube back into the sand, collapsing it back into its carrying case rapidly once it was fully within his small sand burrow.

This had just gotten significantly more complicated.

He needed to tell the guard sergeant.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wxqnap/wait_is_this_just_gate_214/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (213/?)

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"What?!?" He said, startled at the turnaround.

"James Michael Choi!" His mom yelled. "You used to have such a handsome face." She said, exasperated. James peered at Joey, who was trying to keep a neutral face. But James could see the grin in his eyes any time they looked at the camera. "Now it looks like your grandma's tripas!"

"Mom I'm fine." He assured her. "They're just scars." He gestured back to Amina. "It's not like I need to worry about it ruining my prospects for marriage or anything."

"Actually I've been rethinking that now that you're all.... hideous." Amina said with a barely veiled grin before taking a bite of her half of the breakfast sandwich.

"What?" James asked, too startled by yet another surprise statement.

The rest of the conversation was a series of blushes and being laughed at for James.

But he still enjoyed talking to his family. Even when they were joking at his expense.

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Dranek slowly edged his way forward in the sand, keeping the edge of his camouflage cover pressed as low to the ground as he could while moving. It wasn't a perfect match for the sand, but night time was on his side, and he had dusted it and himself with the stuff just to be safe.

He paused every few yards to sniff at the air, careful to keep his noise level down as he did.

It had been nearly three days since he and the other soldiers had left the "Cartography" camp. Once the Sergeant had felt comfortable about the humans not thinking anything of them, he'd dispatched Dranek to do what

he did best; sneak around and observe people that didn't want to be observed.

Dranek liked his job as a ranger.

It suited him well. He'd always been a tad sneaky. Perks of growing up in the Jadesport slums as the runt of his proverbial litter. The fact that he'd gotten branded and capped by the Lunar Council hadn't really affected him too much. He'd never been one for packs anyways, wolves or not.

Plus, as much as the teeth, steel with silver points and magical reinforcement, occasionally caused him pain. He kind of liked how they looked.

And while they marked him as an exile amongst his own kind, they also lent him an advantage if he ever had to fight other werewolves.

Some thought that this was an oversight by the council, making outcasts deadlier against their own. But he knew differently.

Yes it was an advantage in a fight. But winning fights with other wolves meant living alone longer, as opposed to dying, and as a result spiraling deeper into exile.

But.... He'd done the smart thing. He'd joined the army.

The royal army didn't care about your past, or affiliations. Long as you weren't a rapist, murderer, or foreign spy, you could join. Might never make it very high up the ranks without risking your life. But to Dranek, ranger was just fine. He liked the solitude. And being in the deep woods scouting was vastly superior to drinking himself to death, not that that was possible for a werewolf, in the gutters of some city, getting pissed on by every young moon changer who wanted to prove they were tough.

Plus, he got to help on missions like this one.

He looked down at the camp below, careful to keep the edge of his camouflage cover even with the top ridge of the dune he peered over. He watched eagerly with his wide, darkness piercing eyes as the "Cartographers" moved about below.

None of them were trekking out into the desert, which was fair given the time of night.

But also, as he thought of it, why were they even up at this time of night?

He peered up, angling ever so slightly to look up at the moon. It hadn't even hit the rings yet, but it was close. Why were any of them even awake? Save a guard or two they should have all been asleep.

Instead the camp was actually startlingly busy.

Yet Dranek smelled no ink and parchment, he sensed no impressive magical energies, none of the leather and glue of book bindings being stretched and pressed. He only smelled sweat and....

That was it. He smelled that OTHER smell. The odd, chemical scent that he couldn't comprehend.

And where before it had been faint, as if hidden. Now it seemed to come to him more strongly, and seemed to emanate from a good number of the people below, some more strongly than others.

Dranek wondered at the smell. While it was strange, and incredibly strong, he thought he could scent faint undertones that were at least familiar. Granted, most of them were smells that couldn't be found outside of a smithy or an alchemists shop. But there was still depth to the scent.

His hackles rose unexpectedly as the wind shifted suddenly, his lips curling back in a subconscious snarl before his mind had even processed the change.

That unknown smell was suddenly coming from behind him, and very close.

The ranger quickly rolled over onto his back as he tore the light tan cloak from off his back.

He launched to his feet, ready to engage when he saw a man in the cartographers guild colors standing some twenty yards away.

He had some kind of odd, insect-like, glasses over his eyes, and had a long metal device in his hands that Dranek knew would reek of the odd smell if he got closer, or if the wind shifted again. It had a long tube on top that reminded him of some of the looking glasses that he'd had over the years. But its lens was massive.

Dranek saw a small puff of sparks emerge from the end of the device closest to him.

Something punched him in the chest like a war hammer, completely ignoring his leather armor. He suddenly couldn't breath. The report from it arrived only a fraction of a second later.

POP!

That sound was the last thing he heard before dying. He had a moment to think. *That's the smell.* Before he was on the ground.

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Isaacs pulled the bolt back on the massive rifle as he slowly stepped forward. A small netted bag caught the nickel plated shell casing as it silently ejected. Then he silently slid the bolt back forward. He quietly thanked himself for having the foresight to request the suppressed variant of his rifle's barrel a week before.

Isaacs didn't take the cross-hairs off of the downed werewolf. He knew from the intel gathered at the capital that it wasn't dead, and he hadn't intended to kill it either. It was just.... waiting to respawn.

At least that was the closest comparison the chief security officer could draw.

His off hand quickly pulled his jackets top button closer to his mouth for a second.

"Intruder down." He said as he walked forward. "Securing."

Isaacs had no doubt that under more even engagement conditions the wolf would have successfully snuck up on them. Maybe even infiltrated the camp to a limited extent.

It was dead silent in its movement. In fact, Isaacs had seen parallels between how it had been crawling and how he'd been trained to move in sniper school. Plus its cloak, while not perfect, was still damn good at keeping it hidden in the sand. But part of sniper school was also learning how to spot enemy snipers.

But Isaacs' glasses had made easy sport of the poor opponent, showing its thermal signature like a beacon in the cool sand. Plus they'd been warned by the motion sensors on top of the tents, hidden in the poles that held each of them up.

Everything after that had simply been keeping himself further downwind than the wolf, and keeping the rifle hidden in the bottomless bag that he'd picked up while in town with the doctor waiting on their sick comrade's recovery from pneumonia.

Luckily it had done the trick. He hadn't needed to get as close as he had, the rifle was accurate enough that he could have shot the wolf at any time he wanted. But he needed to see just how good the bag did at keeping it concealed. And it turned out that the answer was; quite.

As he got closer to the wolf he tilted the rifle at a forty five degree angle, using the reflex sights on the side. Not that he needed them at this range.

He kicked the downed wolf's leg, celebrating to himself at it's lack of reaction. He slung the rifle over his shoulder, but drew the short sword he'd taken to carrying in this world.

He wasn't sure how to check a pulse on a werewolf, so instead he pressed the cold blade to its snout, checking to see if its breath clouded the shined steel. After nearly a minute of waiting he was satisfied. He quickly pulled out a length of paracord and began rapidly tying up the, temporarily dead, werewolf.

Can this thing really come back from this kind of damage? He wondered as he turned it over to roll it onto its own cloak. The cloak quickly

soaked with blood. *Damn thing has a hole the size of a baseball in its back.*

He scanned the dunes around him, cycling his glasses through their various modes as he did. Then began dragging the massive werewolf to camp, kicking fresh sand over the blood stained trail before he did. He'd have to come back later and really cover up.

But even his glasses couldn't pick up Danil's presence.

The old dwarf had used his sand control magic to tunnel his way under the dunes, following the ranger, more out of curiosity than anything else.

He hadn't expected murder. Much less one so brutally efficient.

Once he'd seen the man from the camp panning around he'd quickly retracted his observation tube back into the sand, collapsing it back into its carrying case rapidly once it was fully within his small sand burrow.

This had just gotten significantly more complicated.

He needed to tell the guard sergeant.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wxqkup/wait_is_this_just_gate_214/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (212/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wv4j3e/wait_is_this_just_gate_211/)

Writer's note: MORE PROGRESS!

Enjoy.

\~

James leaned back in his chair, letting Amina lean into him a bit as they listened to General Krick on the communication station. She'd only arrived a few hours earlier from her trip, and was half asleep despite the importance of the meeting.

"So that's what our scientists have come up with." The General said. "A combination of increased gravity and pressure, mixed with magical mechanics that occur BETWEEN our worlds that we have yet to quantify."

Veliry, Marcos, and several other mages were busily discussing the information as the King spoke up.

"So what does this mean in terms of establishing a return trip?" He asked, ignoring the murmuring. "Have your people thought up any solutions?"

"They've.... got a few." The General replied. "But getting them to work will require extensive preparation and I'll have to get clearance from my superiors." He took a deep breath. "And..... you and Secretary Grant will have to come to some agreements... Officially, your majesty."

King Farrick nodded as he puffed out his cheeks a bit. "Hoped you wouldn't say that." He took a deep breath of his own. "I take it he's already drafting up....." He closed his eyes for a moment. "papers?"

General Krick just nodded in response.

"Fantastic." The King said sarcastically. "I look forward to reading them. In the mean time is there anything you will need us to look into?"

"Um actually there is." The General admitted. "Though it's... somewhat tangential. And might be.... socially.... delicate."

King Farrick perked up at that. "Oh?" He said.

"It's about magic." Krick added. "Namely... how does it work? Not like, how you use it. But the actual fundamentals."

The mages ceased their murmuring almost immediately to look at the screen, roused out of their conversation by the mention of their field of choice.

"What do you mean?" Marcos asked before the King could.

"Well." The General said hesitantly. "We can study.... almost anything, as long as we understand it's constituent pieces." He nodded toward James and Amina. "You read our medical books. You saw how deeply our scientific study can dive into something. We understand the very cells that makeup human biology. And those books didn't mention it, but we can go even smaller than that."

"Wait." Veliry interrupted. "You're talking umm..." She looked to James. "Atomics?" She asked him cautiously.

"Ah." He replied. "Particle physics. Subatomics." He looked back at the General. "Had to explain how I do my oxygen fire trick." He said. "I got approval for it sir." He reassured.

Krick nodded with a raised eyebrow. "That would be the gist of it yes. We need to understand how magic WORKS. What causes it. We know it plays a roll in the trip between worlds. But we need to know how its reacting on OUR side of the trip. Is it trying to help and failing? Or is it some kind of failsafe preventing return trips?" He looked off to the side of his screen for a moment. "On of our people believes that it being part of your bodies might have some theological relevance." He shrugged. "We need to know more so we can put it into our calculations."

Veliry looked to the King with a pleading look.

King Farrick sighed before turning back. "I have no issue with that General. But I would.... HIGHLY.... recommend that you let that conversation occur between our..." He nodded to Veliry. "Research staff."

General Krick nodded slowly. James could hear the muffled conversation off camera on his side.

"Message received sir. I had no intentions otherwise. And thank you, for being so understanding." Krick said as he stepped aside. The King simply nodded. "This is Doctor Oikonomou, or Doctor O. if you prefer. He is the one in charge of the team that came up with the theory."

A frazzle haired, tan skinned man stepped on screen with a smile and wave as King Farrick looked to James who then woke Amina up from her drooling half slumber.

Veliry and the other mages quickly crowded closer to the camera.

"Hi." The doctor said. "I've been dying to get to talk to you guys." He admitted.

"First things first." Veliry said eagerly. "We're all wondering. What is.... gravity? And what does the size of our world have to do with it?"

Dr. Oikonomou's head tilted forward as his eyebrows shot up at the unexpected question.

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"Well. That does all appear to be in order." Sergeant Vhiner'ys said with a sigh. "Still odd that someone wants to map this place out. But, like you said. That's above your head." He handed the scroll back to Nguyen, who took it eagerly.

"Just doing a job." Nguyen said. "How do you like the tea?"

As if to answer the Sergeant of the guard drained his glass in a gulp. He wiped his lips. "Delicious." He said simply. "What is that flavor? That sour fruity flavor?" He asked.

Nguyen smiled. "Ah, that's a single drop of Smeplie juice in the pitcher. A trick that one of our cooks learned while they were traveling on a ship." He lied easily. He didn't want to admit that it was lemon, since they were apparently not native to this world. An unexpected issue with the tea they'd brought with them. He was sure that someone on Earth was scrubbing toilets because of it.

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"Glad you like it." Nguyen said, returning the smile.

"Well." The Sergeant said, ignoring the remark. "Everything looks good here." He gestured around at his people, most of whom were lounging or chatting with the other camp members.

But Nguyen noticed that some were actively inspecting the camp. Especially the werewolves.

"We'll get out of your hair." The Sergeant finished. "Head out and check the Dunebasher's setup. Make sure they have things locked down. They usually do."

"Glad my people could have everything lined up right for once in my life." Nguyen said with a chuckle. "First time for everything."

"You're telling me." The large elf said as he waved his arms at his men. "Come on you lot!" He yelled at them. "Let's go wrangle some dwarves before they accidentally wake up a darkwyrm!"

His men groaned and complained, reminding Nguyen of how his own people tended to act before shit duty. But they all complied.

Vhiner'ys turned back and held his arm out. Nguyen clasped it in the local style.

"Have fun out here Airix." He said as they shook. "Let the guards in Valleyend know whenever you lot head back home."

"Will do." Nguyen replied. "Stop by on your way out of the desert, we'll get you some more of that tea."

Vhiner'ys pointed a finger at him with a grin. "Deal." He said as he turned to leave.

Nguyen stopped for a moment as he was about to enter the main tent and watched them leave. He could only hope that they had sold the whole thing.

He nodded at Isaacs as he stepped in.

"I think we're good." He said to the head of security for the expedition.

Isaacs peeked out of the tent flap. "I'm still gonna keep a pistol under my pillow for a while." He said.

"Fair." Nguyen agreed. "Fuckin' tea almost fucked us."

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As the soldiers slowly trudged over the nearby dune Sergeant Vhiner'ys caught up to Guard Ranger Dranek Godsnose.

"That place was faker than a diamond ring sold in a port's back alley to a young, smitten sailor." He said to the brand-scarred werewolf.

Dranek grinned, revealing the metal capped teeth that marked him as an outcast among his kind.

"Pretty sure that's the consensus among all the men." He replied to the Sergeant. "And there was some odd chemical smell. But it was incredibly faint. I think maybe hidden somewhere."

"The kind of smell that we were warned about?" Vhiner'ys asked.

"They said the smells were unlike anything we'd ever scented before." He thought for a moment. "I'd need to get a good long whiff to confirm. But I think so."

"Their paperwork? All of it?" Vhiner'ys said. "Perfect. Every single page."

Dranek stopped his trudging walk for a moment. "Perfect paperwork?" He asked. "In what world can the cartographers guild.... or any guild for that matter... get perfect paperwork?" He gestured at the desert around them, making Vhiner'ys glad that they were already on the other side of the mountain of sand. "Especially here."

"Exactly." The Elf said in response. "I hate to admit it. But I'm gonna owe that old dwarf a cask of ale for this." He said as they continued walking.

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[\[next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wwxfgv/wait_is_this_just_gate_213/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (212/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wv4hd1/wait_is_this_just_gate_211/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wwxcib/wait_is_this_just_gate_213/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (211/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wspq4l/wait_is_this_just_gate_210/)

Writer's note: As much as I love moving the story forward. It always complicates things.

Also I aint gotta explain shit. The answer is magic shenanigans interacting with a non magical world. Like the General and his staff you're just gonna have to deal with it.

Enjoy.

\~

"Alright. Try getting that ice to touch the ground without actually... you know, touching the ground." James said as he watched Vickers' fists frost over. "Seriously, they didn't tell you anything?"

Vickers focused on his right arm, letting the left one warm back up as the frost crept up his right forearm. He was grimacing.

"Nope. Just that they needed to get some kind of measurement that required a ton of altitude." He said as he grunted with focus. "It was nearly five hours before I got word to go recover the first of the drones after its balloon had popped."

"Drones and balloons?" James wondered. "They must have been going low orbit at that height." He looked at Vickers with softly glowing red

eyes. "No no. Project outward. Visualize the ice as a weapon of some kind. A spear or something."

"I'm trying. And yeah, no heads up what it was." Vickers replied as the icy spikes protruding from his knuckles extended a few inches before stopping. "This is harder than you make it look." He admitted.

"There's a reason I keep blowing myself up." James said with a chuckle. "Close your eyes. Think.... I don't know.... wolverine?" James wondered. "You seem to be taking this a wolverine kinda direction."

"I only got this far because I wanted my punches to be..." He sighed. ".... cooler." Vickers finished.

James just stared at him flatly.

"Yeah I know." Vickers said before James could make a joke.

"Okay." James said with a light shake of his head. "You're a boxer right?" He asked. "I mean. That's the vibe I get when we're sparring, and that's what your training sessions look like."

"Yeah." Vickers answered. "Golden gloves a year after high school."

"Nice." James said with a nod. "Well. Okay. You play Punch-Out X?"

"Yeah. Ships love that game for some reason." Vickers replied. Then he nodded with apprehension. "Kid Frost? Really?"

"Yeah." James said with a grin. "Visualize his stuff."

Vickers groaned. "Weakest character in the game." He said to himself as he closed his eyes.

"Unless he's being played by my little brother." James said under his breath. He jogged over to the side and moved a dummy in front of Vickers. "Alright. When you're ready there's a dummy a few yards in front of you."

James stepped back and made his eyes glow again. He was still getting used to the "Mana-Vision" as he called it. Veliry had only taught it to him a few days earlier. It made things look kind of Acid-Trippy for his taste.

"There you go." He said as he saw the familiar cold energy flowing into Vickers' hands, looking just like his wind magic did when he was readying a pneumatic blast. "Hit the dummy."

Vickers took a deep breath. Then he planted a foot behind him before stepping forward. To James he looked like a martial artist readying a strike, which he supposed was accurate.

"HAH!" Vickers exclaimed while exhaling as his right hand flashed forward, cold vapor trails following it as it formed a fist.

A wave of cold energy slammed into the dummy in a cloud.

James watched in surprise as the dummy almost immediately frosted over, forming small ice crystals on its torso.

Vickers was staring at it with wide eyes.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (211/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wspo4d/wait_is_this_just_gate_210/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: As much as I love moving the story forward. It always complicates things.

Also I aint gotta explain shit. The answer is magic shenanigans interacting with a non magical world. Like the General and his staff you're just gonna have to deal with it.

Enjoy.

\~

"Alright. Try getting that ice to touch the ground without actually... you know, touching the ground." James said as he watched Vickers' fists frost over. "Seriously, they didn't tell you anything?"

Vickers focused on his right arm, letting the left one warm back up as the frost crept up his right forearm. He was grimacing.

"Nope. Just that they needed to get some kind of measurement that required a ton of altitude." He said as he grunted with focus. "It was nearly five hours before I got word to go recover the first of the drones after its balloon had popped."

"Drones and balloons?" James wondered. "They must have been going low orbit at that height." He looked at Vickers with softly glowing red eyes. "No no. Project outward. Visualize the ice as a weapon of some kind. A spear or something."

"I'm trying. And yeah, no heads up what it was." Vickers replied as the icy spikes protruding from his knuckles extended a few inches before stopping. "This is harder than you make it look." He admitted.

"There's a reason I keep blowing myself up." James said with a chuckle. "Close your eyes. Think.... I don't know.... wolverine?" James wondered. "You seem to be taking this a wolverine kinda direction."

"I only got this far because I wanted my punches to be..." He sighed. ".... cooler." Vickers finished.

James just stared at him flatly.

"Yeah I know." Vickers said before James could make a joke.

"Okay." James said with a light shake of his head. "You're a boxer right?" He asked. "I mean. That's the vibe I get when we're sparring, and that's what your training sessions look like."

"Yeah." Vickers answered. "Golden gloves a year after high school."

"Nice." James said with a nod. "Well. Okay. You play Punch-Out X?"

"Yeah. Ships love that game for some reason." Vickers replied. Then he nodded with apprehension. "Kid Frost? Really?"

"Yeah." James said with a grin. "Visualize his stuff."

Vickers groaned. "Weakest character in the game." He said to himself as he closed his eyes.

"Unless he's being played by my little brother." James said under his breath. He jogged over to the side and moved a dummy in front of Vickers. "Alright. When you're ready there's a dummy a few yards in front of you."

James stepped back and made his eyes glow again. He was still getting used to the "Mana-Vision" as he called it. Veliry had only taught it to him a few days earlier. It made things look kind of Acid-Trippy for his taste.

"There you go." He said as he saw the familiar cold energy flowing into Vickers' hands, looking just like his wind magic did when he was readying a pneumatic blast. "Hit the dummy."

Vickers took a deep breath. Then he planted a foot behind him before stepping forward. To James he looked like a martial artist readying a strike, which he supposed was accurate.

"HAH!" Vickers exclaimed while exhaling as his right hand flashed forward, cold vapor trails following it as it formed a fist.

A wave of cold energy slammed into the dummy in a cloud.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (210/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wrw118/wait_is_this_just_gate_209/)

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But her hands still didn't glow with the amber light that other healers could.

"It's happening!" The other trainee said excitedly. Werner glanced over to see the boils on the chef's hand pulsating as the instructor quickly moved over to observe. "I've got it." The young man said as his hand glowed.

"Slow." The instructor said, causing the trainee to look back. "Focus, don't let your excitement break your concentr-"

She paused as Werner heard a distinctly wet -**POP!-** sound.

"AAAGH! Me Hand!" The cook bellowed before beginning to groan in pain.

"ation." Finished the instructor. "Back up please." She said as she calmly nudged the trainee, who looked terrified, out of the way. "It's okay Remus." She said to the injured cook. "It's still just a blown blister. Nothing we can't have fixed easily." Only her pointer finger glowed the amber light. But it was brighter than even the trainee's hand had been. Remus immediately began to look relieved as it moved over his affected hand.

"Focus." Said one of the other healers who had taken up a position next to Werner, who had gotten distracted. "A good healer must learn to maintain a cool head even in times of chaos. Or else they risk losing the patient in front of them." The healer placed a reassuring hand on the shoulder of the soldier. "Though I doubt that recruit Borsten needs to worry quite THAT much for a wee little cut on the shin."

Borsten smiled for a moment before wincing. "I think I'll live." He said. Then he nodded to the commotion in the other bed. "Long as none of that happens." He added with a laugh.

"Right. Sorry." Werner said as she channeled her focus back into visualizing the cut knitting itself shut and scarring over.

The new instructors eyes glowed with a red light as she watched, which Werner had to admit was a touch distracting. But she knew that it was just the magic user's way of inspecting another person's magical energy.

After a few minutes Werner sagged.

"I don't have it yet. Do I?" She asked.

The healer looked at her with pity. "How long have you been here now dear?" She asked.

Werner thought for a moment. "Five months? Maybe six?"

The healer thought for a moment. "I don't think the hero got his until right around that time either. And his powers didn't manifest until it was a life or death situation." She said. "It's a normal thing. Your body isn't as saturated with magic as us native Petravians. You might need a catalyst event." She pondered for a few seconds. "Don't know what kind of thing would have to happen to get a catalyst event for healing magic though."

"Catalyst event?" Werner wondered. "Like some kind of... do or die situation."

"Precisely." The young woman said with a smile. "For the captain it was a fight to the death AND a fight to save his lady love the princess Amina." She scrunched her face for a moment. "And he had another one when the Prince through his spear at him during training." She looked back at Werner. "Personally I think that one was just two fools doing what fools do. But apparently it worked."

The healer gently pressed Werner out of the way before holding her hand over Borsten's leg. Her hands glowed a bright amber, and only a few seconds later the light faded to reveal a healed injury, with only the faintest of scars.

"All better recruit." She said with a smile. "Now back to your Sergeant."

"Aye maa'm. Thank you." Borsten said, also smiling. Then he turned to Werner. "Keep training. You'll get it." He said cheerily.

Werner smiled in return. But it dropped off once he was walking away.

Her hand tamped at her leg a few times before she stuck it in her pocket.

"We'll try again tomorrow ambassador." Said the head instructor from behind her, startling her out of her self pity. "None of us became healing adepts in a single day. It takes time. Go rest. Practice the methods we've given you. And we'll try again when you're ready."

Werner nodded weakly before turning to leave.

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Vickers set the three drones up in the triangular formation in the courtyard that he'd been told to place them in. Then he lifted the pole up until it was as close to straight as he could get it, watching as the two securing lines tightened in the process. Once they were taut he

grabbed the third line from off under his hand and pulled it tight. Then he began walking it out.

The pole was exactly fifty feet tall, with a series of alternating black and white markings all up its sides until it ended in a foot of red paint.

Vickers walked until he was nearly fifty yards away before the line in his hand tightened and ran out. He kneeled down with the end and sank the stake at the end of the line into the dirt, pressing it in with his booted heel.

He pulled his tablet from his waist and opened the video feed.

"Alright guys. We're set up on this end." He said.

"Copy that chief." Said the lead scientist for this particular experiment, a Dr Bradley Oko-something. The doctor interacted with something at his computer. "Drones launching... now."

Vickers watched as the three drones rose straight up, and fast. None of them deviated more than an inch or so from their position, likely only having to correct for wind, and kept going upward with a loud buzz. Vickers watched them curiously for a minute or so before they were up above the light cloud cover.

"Acceleration and elevation gain are good." The doctor said on his side, likely speaking to himself Vickers knew. "Right where those models should be at. How are batteries reading?" He asked someone on the other side. "Alright good. Balloon team be ready."

"Anything else you need me here for doc?" Vickers asked curiously with one last glance upward.

"Hmm? Oh. No. You're good chief." The scientist assured him. "The process is gonna take a few hours at a minimum. And that's assuming everything goes RIGHT. We'll get in touch once we've got a confirmed drop. Then we'll have to get some numbers crunched before we even confirm anything."

"Got it." He said. "How's this gonna help us get back again?"

"Nice try chief. General said we'd tell you when we confirm our suspicion."

"Right. Right...." Vickers replied. "I'mma go grab some lunch."

"Call you in a few chief." The doctor said before Vickers disconnected.

Vickers looked up into the sky one more time, suspicious of the need to veil some kind of atmosphere test or whatever this was. Then he headed inside.

As he stepped through the nearby door he thought he felt the ground rumble, as if an earthquake was occuring. But it only lasted a split

second and after a moment of waiting for it to continue or repeat, he realized that he must have been mistaken.

"Really hope Choi didn't find some new way to blow himself up." He said with a sigh. "Again."

\---

The tendrils protruding from the blight waved anxiously as they devoured the mountain that they'd managed to come into contact with. The "Entity" behind them luxuriated in the mass being added to its ever expanding, ever hungry, formless belly as the tumbling land feature fell into the tendrils and their openings.

It paused its journey long enough for the rest of the mountain to finish collapsing into it. Then it continued in its original direction.

But now it was minutely faster in its motion.

And several new blights blinked into existence. New, smaller, tendrils protruding from them.

The new appendages were just as hard to see as their larger counterparts.

A griffin rider by the name of Prigota Strongmaw, a young and reckless werewolf, had his mount in a hover nearby as he watched the mountain collapse in on itself before seemingly disappearing into thin air.

"What in the hells?" He asked himself as his griffin, Tira, flapped her wings to stay aloft. "You see that girl?" He asked.

Tira looked back at him before shaking her head in confusion.

"Come on. Let's take a look." He said, kicking her forward.

Neither of them ever saw the thing that made them cease existing. One moment they were flying. Then Prigota yelped as he saw Tira's beaked head disappear just like the mountain had.

Then they were gone.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wv4j3e/wait_is_this_just_gate_211/)

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But her hands still didn't glow with the amber light that other healers could.

"It's happening!" The other trainee said excitedly. Werner glanced over to see the boils on the chef's hand pulsating as the instructor quickly moved over to observe. "I've got it." The young man said as his hand glowed.

"Slow." The instructor said, causing the trainee to look back. "Focus, don't let your excitement break your concentr-"

She paused as Werner heard a distinctly wet -**POP!-** sound.

"AAAGH! Me Hand!" The cook bellowed before beginning to groan in pain.

"ation." Finished the instructor. "Back up please." She said as she calmly nudged the trainee, who looked terrified, out of the way. "It's okay Remus." She said to the injured cook. "It's still just a blown blister. Nothing we can't have fixed easily." Only her pointer finger glowed the amber light. But it was brighter than even the trainee's hand had been. Remus immediately began to look relieved as it moved over his affected hand.

"Focus." Said one of the other healers who had taken up a position next to Werner, who had gotten distracted. "A good healer must learn to maintain a cool head even in times of chaos. Or else they risk losing the patient in front of them." The healer placed a reassuring hand on the shoulder of the soldier. "Though I doubt that recruit Borsten needs to worry quite THAT much for a wee little cut on the shin."

Borsten smiled for a moment before wincing. "I think I'll live." He said. Then he nodded to the commotion in the other bed. "Long as none of that happens." He added with a laugh.

"Right. Sorry." Werner said as she channeled her focus back into visualizing the cut knitting itself shut and scarring over.

The new instructors eyes glowed with a red light as she watched, which Werner had to admit was a touch distracting. But she knew that it was just the magic user's way of inspecting another person's magical energy.

After a few minutes Werner sagged.

"I don't have it yet. Do I?" She asked.

The healer looked at her with pity. "How long have you been here now dear?" She asked.

Werner thought for a moment. "Five months? Maybe six?"

The healer thought for a moment. "I don't think the hero got his until right around that time either. And his powers didn't manifest until it was a life or death situation." She said. "It's a normal thing. Your body isn't as saturated with magic as us native Petravians. You might need a catalyst event." She pondered for a few seconds. "Don't know what kind of thing would have to happen to get a catalyst event for healing magic though."

"Catalyst event?" Werner wondered. "Like some kind of... do or die situation."

"Precisely." The young woman said with a smile. "For the captain it was a fight to the death AND a fight to save his lady love the princess Amina." She scrunched her face for a moment. "And he had another one when the Prince threw his spear at him during training." She looked back at Werner. "Personally I think that one was just two fools doing what fools do. But apparently it worked."

The healer gently pressed Werner out of the way before holding her hand over Borsten's leg. Her hands glowed a bright amber, and only a few seconds later the light faded to reveal a healed injury, with only the faintest of scars.

"All better recruit." She said with a smile. "Now back to your Sergeant."

"Aye maa'm. Thank you." Borsten said, also smiling. Then he turned to Werner. "Keep training. You'll get it." He said cheerily.

Werner smiled in return. But it dropped off once he was walking away.

Her hand tamped at her leg a few times before she stuck it in her pocket.

"We'll try again tomorrow ambassador." Said the head instructor from behind her, startling her out of her self pity. "None of us became healing adepts in a single day. It takes time. Go rest. Practice the methods we've given you. And we'll try again when you're ready."

Werner nodded weakly before turning to leave.

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Vickers set the three drones up in the triangular formation in the courtyard that he'd been told to place them in. Then he lifted the pole up until it was as close to straight as he could get it, watching as the two securing lines tightened in the process. Once they were taut he grabbed the third line from off under his hand and pulled it tight. Then he began walking it out.

The pole was exactly fifty feet tall, with a series of alternating black and white markings all up its sides until it ended in a foot of red paint.

Vickers walked until he was nearly fifty yards away before the line in his hand tightened and ran out. He kneeled down with the end and sank the stake at the end of the line into the dirt, pressing it in with his booted heel.

He pulled his tablet from his waist and opened the video feed.

"Alright guys. We're set up on this end." He said.

"Copy that chief." Said the lead scientist for this particular experiment, a Dr Bradley Oko-something. The doctor interacted with something at his computer. "Drones launching... now."

Vickers watched as the three drones rose straight up, and fast. None of them deviated more than an inch or so from their position, likely only having to correct for wind, and kept going upward with a loud buzz. Vickers watched them curiously for a minute or so before they were up above the light cloud cover.

"Acceleration and elevation gain are good." The doctor said on his side, likely speaking to himself Vickers knew. "Right where those models should be at. How are batteries reading?" He asked someone on the other side. "Alright good. Balloon team be ready."

"Anything else you need me here for doc?" Vickers asked curiously with one last glance upward.

"Hmm? Oh. No. You're good chief." The scientist assured him. "The process is gonna take a few hours at a minimum. And that's assuming everything

goes RIGHT. We'll get in touch once we've got a confirmed drop. Then we'll have to get some numbers crunched before we even confirm anything."

"Got it." He said. "How's this gonna help us get back again?"

"Nice try chief. General said we'd tell you when we confirm our suspicion."

"Right. Right...." Vickers replied. "I'mma go grab some lunch."

"Call you in a few chief." The doctor said before Vickers disconnected.

Vickers looked up into the sky one more time, suspicious of the need to veil some kind of atmosphere test or whatever this was. Then he headed inside.

As he stepped through the nearby door he thought he felt the ground rumble, as if an earthquake was occuring. But it only lasted a split second and after a moment of waiting for it to continue or repeat, he realized that he must have been mistaken.

"Really hope Choi didn't find some new way to blow himself up." He said with a sigh. "Again."

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The tendrils protruding from the blight waved anxiously as they devoured the mountain that they'd managed to come into contact with. The "Entity" behind them luxuriated in the mass being added to its ever expanding, ever hungry, formless belly as the tumbling land feature fell into the tendrils and their openings.

It paused its journey long enough for the rest of the mountain to finish collapsing into it. Then it continued in its original direction.

But now it was minutely faster in its motion.

And several new blights blinked into existence. New, smaller, tendrils protruding from them.

The new appendages were just as hard to see as their larger counterparts.

A griffin rider by the name of Prigota Strongmaw, a young and reckless werewolf, had his mount in a hover nearby as he watched the mountain collapse in on itself before seemingly disappearing into thin air.

"What in the hells?" He asked himself as his griffin, Tira, flapped her wings to stay aloft. "You see that girl?" He asked.

Tira looked back at him before shaking her head in confusion.

"Come on. Let's take a look." He said, kicking her forward.

Neither of them ever saw the thing that made them cease existing. One moment they were flying. Then Prigota yelped as he saw Tira's beaked head disappear just like the mountain had.

Then they were gone.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wv4hd1/wait_is_this_just_gate_211/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (209/?)

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"Anyone?" He asked.

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James gestured to them. "Yeah?"

"That these weapons are dangerous sir!" The elf responded. James was surprised to hear a woman's voice emanate from the massive, armored, form.

James nodded, tilting his head a bit as he did.

"Well. That's not wrong." He agreed. He nodded at the elf. "What's your name?" He asked.

"Royal Guardian Ira'Nyl!' She responded in a yell.

"Cool." James replied. "Guardian Ira'Nyl." He said, marvelling at how simply saying her name made her straighten up noticeably. "Draw your pistol."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wspo4d/wait_is_this_just_gate_210/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (208/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wq8x86/wait_is_this_just_gate_207/)

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"Now." He continued. "If you kill a golem that is being controlled, typically the controller dies as well. Their soul becoming untethered with the destruction of their controlled vessel." He nodded his head at James, who raised an eyebrow. "Much like how your drake will die if you do. Because his soul is bound to yours, even if neither of you is using your soul to control the other. But it is the same notion."

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"But in a congruency, ALL the souls are bound to eachother. And the golem's form is, as Captain Choi knows, MUCH tougher to destroy." He moved his hand and a set of smaller human forms surrounded the multi-

faced one. "Additionally the golemmancers knew all of this, and had their bodies surrounded by attendants who could.... recover their souls.... while severing their connection safely should their golems die." The smaller human forms pulled faces from the larger form before moving away and dissapearing. "We managed to isolate and steal one of these souls inside its golem flesh form. But the attendants were capable of safely retrieving the others before they were killed."

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King Farrick nodded his acknowledgement from where he was sitting. Like James he was drinking a cup of the Earth-Style coffee, though he grimaced each time he took a sip.

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"So what's the situation in near Jadesport?" He asked as he pulled his tablet out.

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The king inspected it for a moment, then held it out to James.

"Because now it's my turn to return the favor." The King said as James gingerly took the long, rudimentary, weapon in his hands. It was startlingly light for its size.

"When the hell did you guys manage to put this together?" He asked as he looked it over.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wq8vvv/wait_is_this_just_gate_207/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wpezbv/wait_is_this_just_gate_206/)

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Enjoy

\~

It was mid day when the royal soldiers made it to the camp.

"Hello there!" Said the Sergeant of the guard, a large darkly skinned elf who carried a massive hammer on his back, as he approached. "Is this the cartographer's camp?"

Nguyen approached, hand held out in greeting, and clamped onto the Sergeant's wrist.

"It is." He said as his greeting was reciprocated. "I'm Arix. I'm leading this expedition."

"Good to meet you." The elf said in response. "I'm Sergeant Vhiner'ys. "

Behind him the other soldiers were taking knees, drinking water, and generally relaxing during the break. But Nguyen noticed the handful of werewolves that were sniffing at the air.

"What can I do for you sergeant?" He asked with a smile.

"Oh nothing too crazy." Vhiner'ys said as he looked around. "We're mostly here to oversee the clan dunebasher expedition, make sure they don't actually open anything too crazy down there that causes problems." He turned back to look at Nguyen. "But we'd also heard that there was a cartography camp that had been set up in the desert for some reason and figured we would check it out, make sure you guys are being safe. It can be dangerous being so isolated."

"Well, we appreciate the check up-" Nguyen began. But the soldier cut him off.

"You're all humans?" He asked unexpectedly. Nguyen was about to answer when he continued. "No dwarves? Elves? And no griffins?" He looked around as if to make a point. "Most cartographers just use griffins to map. A quick record from a student's crystal and you can map a whole province in a single day."

"Our employer wanted things done a more traditional way." Nguyen answered. "And we actually have so-"

"Who is your employer?" Vhiner'ys interrupted again. "Who would be interested in this desert beside the Dunebashers?"

"I'm not at liberty to-" Nguyen attempted to say.

"And since when does the Cartographer's Association allow their people to work freelance at this level?" The elf asked. "Director Tilden doesn't even like his map makers doing their own personal studies, much less leading entire freelance expeditions."

"I'm sorry." Nguyen said, his voice suddenly stern. "Am I being interrogated here? I thought you were just checking up on us? If you'd like I have all the necessary paperwork allowing us to be here." He saw Isaacs standing near the tent that was over the box with half of their weapons in it.

"I'd like to see that." Vhiner'ys said without missing a beat. Then he paused as he took a long breath and his shoulder's slumped. "Sorry. We've been marching for days now. I'm just tired, and my eyes don't like all this light. I suppose I'm a bit frustrated." He held his hand up. "Please, forgive my gruffness. I would like to see that paperwork if you get a chance, but I'm not here to hassle you."

"It's.... fine." Nguyen said hesitantly. "Please, follow me. Would you like some refreshments? We have some sweetened tea that we keep chilled."

"That sounds lovely actually." The Sergeant replied with a grin as he moved to follow Nguyen's direction. "Seriously though. An all human expedition?"

"I didn't pick the team." Nguyen replied. "I got hired and put in charge. Those kinds of decisions were above my level."

"Sounds like life as a soldier if you ask me." The elf replied with a chuckle.

You have no idea. Nguyen thought as he led the sergeant into their dining tent.

\----------

It was well into the night when James and Vickers walked back into the castle.

They'd been walking for nearly three days and had actually opted to simply continue through the previous night, much to the griffin riders' protests. But neither of them wanted to be out of the loop of what was happening. Plus Vickers was still worried about additional attacks by the Agency.

He set Steve up in his spot at the stables, glad to see that the drake was mostly healed under the glowing green bandages. Another day or two and he'd likely be good to go. Steve happily crawled into his den, forgoing the goat carcass that James threw out for him, an curled into a ball.

James checked in with the guards near the castle's command room. Amina was gone, already riding to Jadesport with a portion of the army to reinforce it against the blight. So, after stopping at the communication room to send a few quick messages, James simply headed up to his and Amina's room and collapsed into their bed.

He was too tired to care about the sense of dread that was suffusing the entirety of the castle grounds.

Or the way his sword danced and jittered, causing a clattering noise from where he'd set down his gear.

Many floors below in the castle's basement Veliry and Marcos were "interrogating" the lump of golem flesh that they'd captured.

And James didn't want to know why that required the use of necromancy.

\----------

Amina rolled over in her tent when her tablet dinged with a message. She'd taken it from Veliry before leaving so that she could be kept updated on James's status and so she could check the footage from the blighted zone.

>Hey. Heard you're already on the road towards Jadesport.I'm back safe and sound.Will figure out what everything looks like tomorrow. Then I'll catch up to you.Stay safe.Love, James.

Amina clutched the tablet to her chest for a moment as she yawned. Then she sent a short, three word, response so he'd know she'd read his message.

James and Steve would have to ride fast to catch up to them.

She smiled at the thought as she drifted back into sleep.

\----------

Margaret Choi hadn't gotten any update on James in nearly a month at this point.

She'd known that he was going to be on the road for a while due to some kind of memorial service for one of his friends. She also knew that he hadn't been doing too well the last time they'd spoken.

She'd watched as he and Joey had caught up, talking about all the crazy things he'd seen and done.

But while Joey had been, in his own words, stoked about how cool James's new arm was. She had only seen a perversion of the arm he was supposed to have. And one that had only come as a result of him LOSING his arm in the first place.

She'd known when he joined the Army that he might get hurt as a result some day. But the tale he'd told of being burned near to death, and losing a hand as a result, had shocked her. The fact that he'd somehow magically gotten the arm back, but in the form of a "werewolf" arm, had scared her.

She still didn't completely believe the fact that in this other world werewolves were not only real, but were actually considered just normal members of society. And this was despite that fact that James had sent them pictures and videos of him and his now dead werewolf companion.

And now he had one of their arms instead of the one he'd been born with.

She'd scolded the General for letting her son get hurt like that, even as she'd had to admit to herself that it sounded like James had done the damage to himself.

He was so like his father in that way.

And now he'd been off the radar for almost a month, even though it was clear that the staff at the compound were still in touch with him. So, really, it was more accurate to say that she was being kept in the dark.

Then she'd gone in today and actually been told that she wouldn't be allowed into the facility because of a development on the other side that required their attention.

That sounded like bullshit for "we need you to stop bugging us" to her.

What were they up to in there.

It was these thoughts that took up her mind as she walked back into the house that had been provided for them. As a result she hadn't actually paid any attention to the small package that she picked up from the doorstep. In her distraction she'd simply assumed that it was another delivery of one of Joey's games or computer parts or something.

It was only as she sat at the kitchen counter with a fresh cup of coffee that she finally gave it any attention.

On it was a simple, hand written, note in sharpie black.

>We may need to use what you were given before soon. Put these with the other things-K

She picked the package up and was surprised to finally notice how heavy it was. It also sounded like a bag full of coins.

She opened it, and a set of odd gold, silver, and brown coins fell out. They had odd symbols on them, surrounding an image of a crown wreathed in what looked like flowers of some kind on one side. The other side had a picture of a man with a beard on it. It looked like something out of a medieval movie.

Why would they give me these? She wondered as she quietly put them back in the padded envelope and took them to her room. *What is going on in that facility?*

\----------

Dr. Bradley Oikonomou panted as he sprinted through the hallway and toward the command room.

A soldier raised their hand to challenge him as he rounded a corner. But he just ignored them and kept running, folder clutched in his hands with a death grip.

"NO TIME!" He yelled as he ran past the agitated soldier.

He swiped his access badge eagerly, and as soon as he heard the lock disengage he burst into the command room hard enough to knock on of the techs on their back, spilling their coffee on them in the process.

"I'm so sorry!" He exclaimed as the entire room looked at him in surprise, the guards in the corners reaching for the pistols on their hips. "We've figured it out!" He said with a smile.

"Figured what out?" Colonel Muhammed asked as she glared at him. "Who the hell are you and why did you just charge into this command room." She turned to the guards. "Restrain this man!" She ordered them as they were already moving toward him.

"Wait!" Bradley interjected, holding the folder up in front of him like a shield. "We've figured out why they can't come back through!"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wqzdgy/wait_is_this_just_gate_208/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (207/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wpevw2/wait_is_this_just_gate_206/) /
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"Who is your employer?" Vhiner'ys interrupted again. "Who would be interested in this desert beside the Dunebashers?"

"I'm not at liberty to-" Nguyen attempted to say.

"And since when does the Cartographer's Association allow their people to work freelance at this level?" The elf asked. "Director Tilden doesn't even like his map makers doing their own personal studies, much less leading entire freelance expeditions."

"I'm sorry." Nguyen said, his voice suddenly stern. "Am I being interrogated here? I thought you were just checking up on us? If you'd like I have all the necessary paperwork allowing us to be here." He saw Isaacs standing near the tent that was over the box with half of their weapons in it.

"I'd like to see that." Vhiner'ys said without missing a beat. Then he paused as he took a long breath and his shoulder's slumped. "Sorry. We've been marching for days now. I'm just tired, and my eyes don't like all this light. I suppose I'm a bit frustrated." He held his hand up. "Please, forgive my gruffness. I would like to see that paperwork if you get a chance, but I'm not here to hassle you."

"It's.... fine." Nguyen said hesitantly. "Please, follow me. Would you like some refreshments? We have some sweetened tea that we keep chilled."

"That sounds lovely actually." The Sergeant replied with a grin as he moved to follow Nguyen's direction. "Seriously though. An all human expedition?"

"I didn't pick the team." Nguyen replied. "I got hired and put in charge. Those kinds of decisions were above my level."

"Sounds like life as a soldier if you ask me." The elf replied with a chuckle.

You have no idea. Nguyen thought as he led the sergeant into their dining tent.

\----------

It was well into the night when James and Vickers walked back into the castle.

They'd been walking for nearly three days and had actually opted to simply continue through the previous night, much to the griffin riders' protests. But neither of them wanted to be out of the loop of what was happening. Plus Vickers was still worried about additional attacks by the Agency.

He set Steve up in his spot at the stables, glad to see that the drake was mostly healed under the glowing green bandages. Another day or two and he'd likely be good to go. Steve happily crawled into his den, forgoing the goat carcass that James threw out for him, an curled into a ball.

James checked in with the guards near the castle's command room. Amina was gone, already riding to Jadesport with a portion of the army to reinforce it against the blight. So, after stopping at the communication room to send a few quick messages, James simply headed up to his and Amina's room and collapsed into their bed.

He was too tired to care about the sense of dread that was suffusing the entirety of the castle grounds.

Or the way his sword danced and jittered, causing a clattering noise from where he'd set down his gear.

Many floors below in the castle's basement Veliry and Marcos were "interrogating" the lump of golem flesh that they'd captured.

And James didn't want to know why that required the use of necromancy.

\------------------------

Amina rolled over in her tent when her tablet dinged with a message. She'd taken it from Veliry before leaving so that she could be kept updated on James's status and so she could check the footage from the blighted zone.

>Hey. Heard you're already on the road towards Jadesport.
>
>I'm back safe and sound.
>
>Will figure out what everything looks like tomorrow. Then I'll catch up to you.
>
>Stay safe.
>
>Love, James.

Amina clutched the tablet to her chest for a moment as she yawned. Then she sent a short, three word, response so he'd know she'd read his message.

James and Steve would have to ride fast to catch up to them.

She smiled at the thought as she drifted back into sleep.

\----------

Margaret Choi hadn't gotten any update on James in nearly a month at this point.

She'd known that he was going to be on the road for a while due to some kind of memorial service for one of his friends. She also knew that he hadn't been doing too well the last time they'd spoken.

She'd watched as he and Joey had caught up, talking about all the crazy things he'd seen and done.

But while Joey had been, in his own words, stoked about how cool James's new arm was. She had only seen a perversion of the arm he was supposed to have. And one that had only come as a result of him LOSING his arm in the first place.

She'd known when he joined the Army that he might get hurt as a result some day. But the tale he'd told of being burned near to death, and losing a hand as a result, had shocked her. The fact that he'd somehow magically gotten the arm back, but in the form of a "werewolf" arm, had scared her.

She still didn't completely believe the fact that in this other world werewolves were not only real, but were actually considered just normal members of society. And this was despite that fact that James had sent them pictures and videos of him and his now dead werewolf companion.

And now he had one of their arms instead of the one he'd been born with.

She'd scolded the General for letting her son get hurt like that, even as she'd had to admit to herself that it sounded like James had done the damage to himself.

He was so like his father in that way.

And now he'd been off the radar for almost a month, even though it was clear that the staff at the compound were still in touch with him. So, really, it was more accurate to say that she was being kept in the dark.

Then she'd gone in today and actually been told that she wouldn't be allowed into the facility because of a development on the other side that required their attention.

That sounded like bullshit for "we need you to stop bugging us" to her.

What were they up to in there.

It was these thoughts that took up her mind as she walked back into the house that had been provided for them. As a result she hadn't actually paid any attention to the small package that she picked up from the doorstep. In her distraction she'd simply assumed that it was another delivery of one of Joey's games or computer parts or something.

It was only as she sat at the kitchen counter with a fresh cup of coffee that she finally gave it any attention.

On it was a simple, hand written, note in sharpie black.

>We may need to use what you were given before soon. Put these with the other things
>
>\-K

She picked the package up and was surprised to finally notice how heavy it was. It also sounded like a bag full of coins.

She opened it, and a set of odd gold, silver, and brown coins fell out. They had odd symbols on them, surrounding an image of a crown wreathed in what looked like flowers of some kind on one side. The other side had a picture of a man with a beard on it. It looked like something out of a medieval movie.

Why would they give me these? She wondered as she quietly put them back in the padded envelope and took them to her room. *What is going on in that facility?*

\---

Dr. Bradley Oikonomou panted as he sprinted through the hallway and toward the command room.

A soldier raised their hand to challenge him as he rounded a corner. But he just ignored them and kept running, folder clutched in his hands with a death grip.

"NO TIME!" He yelled as he ran past the agitated soldier.

He swiped his access badge eagerly, and as soon as he heard the lock disengage he burst into the command room hard enough to knock on of the techs on their back, spilling their coffee on them in the process.

"I'm so sorry!" He exclaimed as the entire room looked at him in surprise, the guards in the corners reaching for the pistols on their hips. "We've figured it out!" He said with a smile.

"Figured what out?" Colonel Muhammed asked as she glared at him. "Who the hell are you and why did you just charge into this command room." She turned to the guards. "Restrain this man!" She ordered them as they were already moving toward him.

"Wait!" Bradley interjected, holding the folder up in front of him like a shield. "We've figured out why they can't come back through!"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wqzc0c/wait_is_this_just_gate_208/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (206/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wmtlo6/wait_is_this_just_gate_205/)

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"What is it Sticky?" Nguyen replied as he and Isaacs turned to look at the intruding specialist. Then he hissed. "And why aren't you using my NAME?"

"Sorry.... Chief Arix." Sticky corrected himself as he stood up straighter. "But we have a slight problem." He paused as he remembered the name of one of the new arrivals. "Um.... Sten.... the uh, new guy. Well he was on a 'mapping trip' over near the pass."

"Spit it out sticky." Isaacs said"

Sticky swallowed nervously. "There's a patrol of Royal Guard forces coming up the pass. Sten said that he was able to see a couple of uh, werewolves, with them."

The two seniors shared a glance with each other.

"Secret squirrel stuff." Isaacs said with a hint of exasperation.

"Yeah." Nguyen confirmed.

Isaacs walked a few steps away before turning back and pulling on the rug he'd been standing on. "Burger and fries. No pickles." He said into the toggle on his jacket collar. Nguyen shook his head at the ridiculous phrase that had been programmed into the system on Earth.

There was a slight humming noise from where Isaacs had been standing before. A few seconds after it had started a rectangular metal tube protruded from the ground, roughly three feet wide in each direction. A jet of compressed air cleared the sand off of the top of it. A noise came from inside and after a moment the top of the tube lowered and then hinged off to the side.

A technician, one of the new arrivals by the name of Hill, was hanging from the rungs of the ladder inside. She looked around curiously for a moment.

"Scrambling Chief Arix?" She asked.

"Yeah." Nguyen replied with a frustrated sigh as he kneeled down. "Head back down, tell everyone we're going stealth for the next few days. Then set everything to dead. And wire the other boxes."

Hill nodded. "Got it boss. Give us twenty tops, can't speak for the other boxes." She said before descending back down.

"Faster'd be better." He said just before he heard her begin relaying the orders to the other two that were down below with her. He stood up and looked at the other two present. "Sticky go spread the word. Isaacs you're on double check duty."

The two nodded before heading out of the tent flap. Nguyen began packing and concealing everything in the tent he was in since it had actual intel in it. He tossed the stuff that needed real hiding down the hatch with a warning before he was done.

A little over fifteen minutes later he watched as Hill and the other two clambered out of the hatch.

"Eighty six the burgers until we get our next shipment of buns." He said into the open hatch. He hated how restaurant-ish all the code-words for the boxes were. He'd spent three years working at a diner after high school and as much as he'd liked the crew there, he'd hated the actual job.

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Nguyen looked over the camp, and its now bustling crew, to gaze in the direction of the pass. He couldn't see it from there, but he knew that danger was coming from that direction.

He didn't see Sherk flying overhead and watching the camp move about. Even from as high as he was, he could see the sand shifting around the tents.

After all, he was a Dunebasher.

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"So. How do you do the fire?" Vickers asked as he and James walked down the road.

Veliry and a few of the griffin riders were riding along in front of and behind them, while the rest were in the air above them. Marcos and one of them had already flown back to the capital so that the elderly mage could begin studying the clump of golem that they'd captured and preserved.

"I think of heat." James replied simply. "I think of campfires, and blowtorches and cigar lighters and things like that." He paused. "I tried thinking of flamethrowers one time."

"Fuck that." Vickers replied. "Flamethrowers explode."

"How do you think I learned to fly?" James responded. "I was thinking of a flamethrower emitting from the bottom of my foot. Then that scene from that old Nick Cage, World War Two movie popped into my head. Ruined the whole visualization process. And now.... I fly with explosions."

"Really?" Vickers said with a hint of judgment. "That's so fuckin' stupid. And that movie was awful."

"Says the wannabe subzero cosplayer." James countered."And it's not like IIIII made the magical rules around here." He said with a nod back to where Veliry was riding.

"Eh. Fair enough." Vickers agreed.

"By the way. How did YOU get magic?" James asked. "And why ice?"

"Real talk?" Vicker asked. "I wanted to punch the shit out of you one day."

James furrowed his eyebrows at the confession.

"I think the rest is me just being cold blooded." Vickers continued.

James stopped walking, causing Steve to stop behind him, as he cringed.

"Dude." James said with a shake of his head. "Do you even hear yourself just now?"

Vickers thought for a moment, stopping as he did. Then he shook his head too. "Holy shit I just sounded like a massive douchebag."

"Yeah you did." James agreed as he began walking again.. "What the hell man?"

"God. Does magic mess with your brain too?" Vickers wondered. "Like. I know it's doin' something weird with our blood and stuff. But what the hell was that?"

James kept walking but stayed a few steps further away, drawing a look of confusion from the SEAL.

"What?" James said as he noticed the expression. "I didn't wanna get to close to Mr Cool Ice." He added with his arms up in mock surrender.

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Werner walked into the healing ward awkwardly.

She'd never been in it before. Not even when James or Vickers had been recovering after the battle with the elemental. It had been packed and she had no real medical experience, so she hadn't wanted to get in the way.

But that wasn't the real reason she'd avoided the place.

The truth was that she hated hospitals. And as rustic as parts of the castle may have looked, the healing ward looked like a hospital ward, and smelled like one too.

She looked around for a moment, startled at how much the room reminded her of some of the clinics she'd seen in other countries around the world.

She didn't notice her hand start shaking.

"Can I help you miss?" A soft voice asked, causing her to jump.

Werner looked back to see what looked like a child, wearing the tell tale white robes with green trim that marked a healer.

"Um. Yes." Werner said hesitantly. "You're one of the healers?"

"I am." The small woman said with a small smile. "I am healer Opila Longwalker. Are you hurt or sick? How can I help you?"

"Uh, No." Werner answered. Then she reconsidered. "Well. Kind of. I'm ambassador Werner. From Earth." Werner introduced herself. "I was wondering if I could ask some questions about healing magic. Is there somewhere we can talk?"

"Certainly." Opila said. She gestured to a door "Please."

Werner went in and saw the familiar site of an exam room. Opila ushered her in and gestured at the bed and the stool next to it. Once Werner was sitting on the stool Opila sat on one of her own.

"What would you like to know?" Opila asked. "The King has authorized us to assist you and your companions as much as we can. You mentioned that you were 'kind of' sick?"

"That's.... very nice of him." Werner said. "And yeah..." She paused as she thought of what to say. Her hands gripped at the hem of her blazer. "Um. What do you know about the brain?" She asked. "Or genetics?"

"Well I know that the brain is one of the two most important organs in a human," She gestured at Werner with her hand. "body. And, genetics?" Opila wondered. "Like familial lineage?"

Werner nodded. "It's... a bit more complex." She said. "Have you had a chance to read the medical textbooks that Captain Choi had sent over?" She asked.

"I've read the translated versions." Opila gestured at the ward outside. "But sadly most of my time, and as a result my study of it, has been focused on the mundane aspects." She admitted before grinning a bit. "Especially the stuff that helps our soldiers recover from their days off." She said slyly.

Werner chuckled. It seemed that no matter what universe you were in, soldiers were still soldiers.

"Well." She said, her face hardening again. "I... I have this.... condition. With my brain." Opila's eyebrows raised and her hand rested on top of Werner's, stilling it.

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Werner let out a small smile. She pulled a small, worn out, pamphlet from her purse. She'd read it a million times. "It's... well, we call it Huntington's disease."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wq8x86/wait_is_this_just_gate_207/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (206/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wmtkao/wait_is_this_just_gate_205/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (205/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wm2zg8/wait_is_this_just_gate_204/)

Writer's note: James makes waves. Also, soon enough you'll get to know what Werner's deal is. Mostly.

Enjoy.

\~

Unbeknownst to either; both Veliry and General Krick watched the footage of James's fight frame by frame as the light faded from the day.

Veliry had long since learned how to operate the startlingly intuitive recording and play back programs on the tablets that Earth had supplied them with. It had seemed like a magic of its own at first. But the absolute lack of any magical energy in the devices always amazed her, even if she more or less understood how it worked.

But right now her focus was on what the tablet showed.

For James to not only have survived a fight with a group of the golems, but also their commander, and their resulting fused form was nothing short of incredible. She doubted even Amina or Kela could manage such a feat of fighting prowess. Though she would admit that his possession of the Mage's Blade definitely put him at an advantage, its capabilities making it the bane of magically created creatures of all kinds.

Still, his movements and tactics in the footage spoke to his capabilities.

She watched as he moved so fast the camera struggled to track him, his form blurring in between different frames of as he blasted around the area.

His explosions were larger and more violent, yet also more controlled, than they had been during the fight with the elemental months earlier.

She saw him flipping and spinning like a top, is arms and legs tightening or relaxing to increase or decrease his rotations as needed.

She couldn't help but be amazed at how fluidly he controlled his chain weapon with his wind magic even as he continued flying about and wielding other weapons. Even using wind magic to move a chain like he did spoke to a focus and control that most mages would struggle to even initiate. Yet James did it as though by instinct.

She looked over to where he was sleeping, his body tucked into the side of Steve's body as they both rested. Steve had draped his furred tail over him to keep him warm. She knew that his sword was just underneath that tail, in arms reach. The site reminded her of how Gixelle had often slept when they'd all been traveling together.

She thought back to her own training as a mage. It had been years before she'd even been capable of creating a consistent wind spray from her hand. In fact, most mages she knew didn't get past the apprentice stage until they were well into their thirties. Some never got past that point. She was considered by many to be a prodigy because once she'd finally unlocked her magical abilities she'd progressed rapidly. She simply attributed it to studiousness.

But James was something different.

She wanted to think that he was his world's equivalent of a prodigy as well. That maybe his physiology, which was designed NOT to require magical energy, was simply stronger once it got it. Vickers being able to somehow manifest frost magic, and in combat no less, seemed to confirm the theory.

But that still didn't explain the footage that she was watching.

Between his explosive flight style, his reflex enhancing vision power, his wind magic, his weapons, and his own sheer combat prowess, James was fighting at a level that was on the Arch-Mage level. In fact, she thought it might have been even higher. After all, his newfound skills would carry over even if he went back to Earth somehow. Even if his magic was completely absent, his new skills would make him an absolutely dangerous opponent.

She looked over to the campfire where Vickers was sitting and listening to the jokes of the griffin riders quietly.

James was considered a standard soldier on his world. Vickers was considered to be his world's Elite warrior. What would happen if the large, abrasive, man accelerated through magical skills like James had.

She liked James. During his time in this world he had become someone she considered a close friend, and knew from previous travels with him that she could likely trust him with her life if she needed to. She certainly trusted both Amina and Kela that way, and James had won both of them over. And in Amina's case had even overcome her initial anger at him and

become her lover and betrothed. The King liked him, and even the people of the land spoke of him as a hero.

But she'd also heard the warnings he'd given them about the people of his world, their greed, their cleverness, their violence.

Looking at the footage, thinking of how Vickers had engaged the golem, remembering the devastation outside of Jadesport, Veliry began to worry about these people from this other world.

She liked and trusted James.

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As Veliry contemplated the safety of her world, General Krick was thinking in a startlingly similar fashion.

He watched Choi's footage with fascination as he saw the superhuman movements and attacks.

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He'd been surprised to hear of Choi's advancements through the other world. His fights seemed to be escalating to higher and higher levels and yet despite that the young mustang continued to rise to every challenge.

And now Vickers was some kind of ice boxer. And he knew that a few of the desert team had also managed to figure out magic, albeit not as expansively as Choi had.

And even though the General wanted nothing more than continuing peace, the idea of super-powered soldiers was something that even he couldn't deny the desire for.

What was worse, was that he knew the Secretary would see the footage and think the exact same thing. Grant had holed up at the third site and had complete control over a doorway that the King and his people had no knowledge of. On top of that Grant was ensuring that all the data from all three sites was being routed directly to him at all times. He would see this footage and know what it meant compared to past reports.

General Krick suspected that he might have to do something about that soon enough.

And they still needed to figure out how to get their people back.

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Werner was in bed when her phone went off. She rolled over to grab it as she yawned. She couldn't deny that despite their otherwise medieval stylings, the Petravians knew how to make a bed.

She looked at the simple message on the phone as she licked her lips, trying to get moisture back in them as she slowly came back to consciousness.

>You need to convince the locals to teach you magic.-S.G.

What? She wondered.

She was about to reread the message when her phone dinged again. This time it had received a video.

She tapped her finger on the icon and brought the footage up. She'd been in the communication room monitoring the situation with Choi. But the communication hub was basically just a massive router that served to relay data from one side to the other. It's capacity for processing footage or data was about as minimal as it got. So the footage she'd been seeing from the drones had been choppy and pixelated as the massive amounts of data had been controlled by the techs on Earth.

This new footage on her phone had clearly been allowed to parse over the long chain of drones from the capital to where the fight had been. Each bit and byte had been allowed to send and compile in its own time, then someone had compiled it all and processed out any errors.

She didn't like Choi, but she couldn't deny what she was seeing. The young man was a magical powerhouse.

She looked back at the message.

Getting her hands on magic, whether via training or books or scrolls or whatever other form, had always been an objective. But it had been one that had specifically been set on a back burner. Going after it too early was a touch aggressive for a political gain.

But Secretary Grant had seen Choi's footage too. And he wanted more magic in Earth's arsenal.

Watching it again, she understood why.

She yawned again, and as her muscles tensed her hand spasmed, cracking a knuckle unintentionally. She also felt one of her feet kick the other.

She groaned and grabbed a pill from the night stand.

Fine. She thought. *But if I'm asking for magic, it's gonna be the healing kind. Leave the explosions and ice fists to those two neanderthals.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wpezbv/wait_is_this_just_gate_206/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (205/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wm2xmp/wait_is_this_just_gate_204/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James makes waves. Also, soon enough you'll get to know what Werner's deal is. Mostly.

Enjoy.

\~

Unbeknownst to either; both Veliry and General Krick watched the footage of James's fight frame by frame as the light faded from the day.

Veliry had long since learned how to operate the startlingly intuitive recording and play back programs on the tablets that Earth had supplied them with. It had seemed like a magic of its own at first. But the absolute lack of any magical energy in the devices always amazed her, even if she more or less understood how it worked.

But right now her focus was on what the tablet showed.

For James to not only have survived a fight with a group of the golems, but also their commander, and their resulting fused form was nothing short of incredible. She doubted even Amina or Kela could manage such a feat of fighting prowess. Though she would admit that his possession of the Mage's Blade definitely put him at an advantage, its capabilities making it the bane of magically created creatures of all kinds.

Still, his movements and tactics in the footage spoke to his capabilities.

She watched as he moved so fast the camera struggled to track him, his form blurring in between different frames of as he blasted around the area.

His explosions were larger and more violent, yet also more controlled, than they had been during the fight with the elemental months earlier.

She saw him flipping and spinning like a top, is arms and legs tightening or relaxing to increase or decrease his rotations as needed.

She couldn't help but be amazed at how fluidly he controlled his chain weapon with his wind magic even as he continued flying about and wielding other weapons. Even using wind magic to move a chain like he did spoke to a focus and control that most mages would struggle to even initiate. Yet James did it as though by instinct.

She looked over to where he was sleeping, his body tucked into the side of Steve's body as they both rested. Steve had draped his furred tail

over him to keep him warm. She knew that his sword was just underneath that tail, in arms reach. The site reminded her of how Gixelle had often slept when they'd all been traveling together.

She thought back to her own training as a mage. It had been years before she'd even been capable of creating a consistent wind spray from her hand. In fact, most mages she knew didn't get past the apprentice stage until they were well into their thirties. Some never got past that point. She was considered by many to be a prodigy because once she'd finally unlocked her magical abilities she'd progressed rapidly. She simply attributed it to studiousness.

But James was something different.

She wanted to think that he was his world's equivalent of a prodigy as well. That maybe his physiology, which was designed NOT to require magical energy, was simply stronger once it got it. Vickers being able to somehow manifest frost magic, and in combat no less, seemed to confirm the theory.

But that still didn't explain the footage that she was watching.

Between his explosive flight style, his reflex enhancing vision power, his wind magic, his weapons, and his own sheer combat prowess, James was fighting at a level that was on the Arch-Mage level. In fact, she thought it might have been even higher. After all, his newfound skills would carry over even if he went back to Earth somehow. Even if his magic was completely absent, his new skills would make him an absolutely dangerous opponent.

She looked over to the campfire where Vickers was sitting and listening to the jokes of the griffin riders quietly.

James was considered a standard soldier on his world. Vickers was considered to be his world's Elite warrior. What would happen if the large, abrasive, man accelerated through magical skills like James had.

She liked James. During his time in this world he had become someone she considered a close friend, and knew from previous travels with him that she could likely trust him with her life if she needed to. She certainly trusted both Amina and Kela that way, and James had won both of them over. And in Amina's case had even overcome her initial anger at him and become her lover and betrothed. The King liked him, and even the people of the land spoke of him as a hero.

But she'd also heard the warnings he'd given them about the people of his world, their greed, their cleverness, their violence.

Looking at the footage, thinking of how Vickers had engaged the golem, remembering the devastation outside of Jadesport, Veliry began to worry about these people from this other world.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wpevw2/wait_is_this_just_gate_206/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (204/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wl5w24/wait_is_this_just_gate_203/)

Writer's note: Things continue moving forward regardless of how fun the action sequences are.

Bit of a short one. But that's kind of how the post fight scenes always are.

Enjoy.

\~

"They were with the Agency, right?" James asked as Veliry and Marcos came over, having finished whatever ritual they'd used to seal the last piece of golem away.

He and Vickers had finished bandaging Steve up nearly twenty minutes ago and James was now leaning up against Steve's side as one of the griffin riders ran their glowing hands along James's injuries which Vickers had already wrapped with the familiar green bandages. Marcos split off with his eyes still glowing as he surveyed the area.

"They were. Or at least that's the most likely scenario." Veliry said with a nod as she lifted James's foot and inspected the black veins running up to his ankle. "How are you?"

James grunted as she prodded at the black lines. "I'm fine." He replied. The griffin ride, Amurik, grunted as he moved James's arm, drawing a wince from him with the motion. James's jaw clenched at the sudden pain. "Okay.... I'm.... not terrible." Amurik raised an eyebrow. "Fine.... I'll live."

The elf simply shrugged as he continued his healing.

"What happened?" Veliry asked. "What were blood stone golems doing here?"

"I didn't exactly have time to ask." James replied. "They started attacking pretty much on sight. But I recognized them from the Chief's footage of the raid on their compound." He said, nodding in the direction of the SEAL as he kicked over some of the burnt out remains of the massive golem.

"How many of them were there when you started?" She asked curiously.

"Started with eight, I think." James replied. "Then I got out to this clearing and there were even more. Maybe ten or so?" He wondered. Things had been too much of a hectic blur for him to keep track. "One of them had wings." He said absently.

"A commander subtype?" She said in amazement. "Where was that? Did it join with the rest of them in the merger?" She asked.

"No." James replied. "No he got turned into a pile of ashes."

"You defeated a blood stone golem commander?" She asked incredulously, shaking her head. She stood up, looking at the pile of ashen dirt nearby that Vickers and Marcos were inspecting. "And based on the size of the amalgam that had to have been at least six or seven of the remaining ones, maybe less. How big were they?" She asked.

James shrugged. "I don't know." He admitted. "At least ten feet. Maybe taller."

"And that's a projectile. So they had harden-able form detachment capabilities." She said as she walked over to the nearby spike that was still in the ground. The one that had caused Steve's greatest injury.

He thought that was the end of it. That Veliry was spiraling into her typical, over analytical, way of inspecting things. But several minutes later she came back.

"Do you have your communication device with you?" She asked, startling James out of the beginning of a nap.

James reached down to the pouch on his belt and pulled out his phone.

"Oops." He said as he retrieved the remains of the device. At some point in the fight it had taken an impact that had shattered the screen and practically bent it at a right angle. "Guess I need a new one."

Veliry didn't even linger. "Chief Vickers!" She yelled as she jogged over to where the large man was leaning on a tree. "I need to speak to the General!"

James simply leaned back against Steve, careful not to press against any of the drake's bandages, and closed his eyes, thankful that they'd already planned on waiting until the next morning to head back.

\----------

Amina stood atop the walls of the castle looking down at the soldiers below her. The units she'd rearranged for the deployment to Jadesport were all present and equipped, ready for the order to move.

The archers all had arrows from Earth. They could only afford to give each of them fifteen, but it was still better than nothing.

The non archers had rune stones, each of them carrying at least twenty alternating types of the small magical explosives in a pouch on their belt.

On top of that, each column had a mage attached to them for additional firepower. These mages were meant to help spot incoming attacks with their enhanced detection abilities, and to help supplement the amount of rune stones on the trip over, crafting them on the way.

Even still Amina knew from the previous battle that their chances of winning another battle against the blight possessed were slim.

And she could tell from the faces below that they knew the odds as well. After all, the results of the previous battle hadn't exactly been kept secret.

"Men and women of Petravus!" She said from the wall. "You know why you're here." She looked around the formation as they all straightened up. "You know where we're going. Our talon of griffin riders already

took off yesterday to beat us there and gather information on what we're heading into."

She paused, allowing them to murmur for a moment. She saw her father on the castle balcony overlooking the courtyard. Alixan was sitting atop his new griffin on the same balcony, armored and ready to go.

"Word from General Sigbert is good." She continued. "So far the attack on the monitoring site hasn't resulted in any changes. But he also admits that his forces are diminished enough that he can no longer monitor the blight lands. Not while rebuilding the city and defending his people at the same time."

She paused again, looking around at them once more.

"That's what we're going to do." She said. "We signed on as soldiers to help our country. To defend its people.... To fight back the dark and unknown things that would threaten our homes and families." She watched as the soldiers nodded solemnly.

"Or!.... If you're like me you just did it to get out from under your parent's thumbs and get drunk with a bunch of fellow degenerates while playing with swords!" She said with a devilish grin. Laughter broke out amongst the soldiers as she saw her father press his hand over his eyes and shake his head. Alixan was beaming, a smile spread across his face.

"We're going into the unknown." She said, bringing the laughter to an end. "To fight things out of our nightmares."

She let the words sink in.

"So let's do it right and make our fellow degenerates proud, yeah?" She said finally.

The men below released a series of whoops and cries of "Yeah!"

She stepped up to the edge of the wall and dropped off, landing next to her horse before taking the reins from her new Captain and climbing into the saddle.

"MOVE OUT!" She yelled over her shoulder as the other soldiers hopped into their saddles, or rushed into the backs of wagons and began moving to follow.

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Jadesport was not the only place that Blight had manifested in Petravus. And it most certainly wasn't the only place in the world that it had manifested.

But it was one of the few places where the forces of the Cleansing had been successfully rebuffed.

And it was the largest example of the blight's manifestation.

Unknown to the King and his forces there was an area of blight set high in the mountains on the western side of the country.

There were no communities nearby. No nearby roads.

The only living beings who even noticed anything happen were a handful of goats who called the mountains their home. But even they left once they sensed the blights appearance

So nobody was there to notice the patches of unfathomable emptiness begin to spread.

While hard to look directly at, a determined person may have noticed that the blight began to take on the appearance of a set of long, writhing, tendrils.

Everything they touched vanished as they spread and moved, causing an avalanche that went unnoticed.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wmtlo6/wait_is_this_just_gate_205/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (204/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wl5uj3/wait_is_this_just_gate_203/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wmtkao/wait_is_this_just_gate_205/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (203/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wk9sd8/wait_is_this_just_gate_202/)

Writer's note: Bah Gawd! Vickers just jumped from the top rope. He damn near broke the Golem in half! Oh the humanity!

Enjoy.

\~

James had thought that the new form of the golem, or whatever it would be called now, would have been easier to deal with. It was bigger, and the spikes it threw were massive. But it was also slower, and it seemed incredibly uncoordinated.

But everywhere he moved the glowing red eyes formed on its body and tracked him.

And any time he tried to attack, the massive creature would shift its form, creating holes or repositioning limbs to avoid the brunt of the damage. He was still getting little hits in, slices with his blade that devoured its flesh, blasts of black lightning and flames that charred it. But it was being kept to a minimum.

It didn't help that it was getting faster and more sure footed as the fight drew on.

The massive creature also proved more than capable of handling both James and Steve at the same time. Even as James sprinted and blasted his way around the area harassing it, it managed to engage with the massive black drake using the spike attacks. To his credit Steve seemed to realize the inherent danger in the situation and had fallen back into the thick coverage of the trees, using them to avoid direct attacks and forcing the golem to work. But the downside of this tactic was that Steve wasn't capable of directly engaging with it, not being in range to use his flames, much less to get a hold of the thing.

If there was one up side to the creature's split focus it was the fact that James was capable of scoring several direct hits on the glowing

eyes with his rifle, lessening their effect minutely. But the golem learned quickly, and after James had taken five of the eyes from it it had learned to retract them any time he brought his rifle to his shoulder. James adjusted in turn, raising the rifle any time he needed to blind the creature even momentarily to buy himself time.

But he could feel himself tiring, and knew Steve was beginning to suffer the same effect.

He'd been running, casting, and fighting for what had to have been damn near half a day at this point. And that wasn't even counting the initial running skirmish before he and Steve had managed to find open ground. He'd taken to casting most of his ranged spells with his wolf hand, as he'd begun feeling the familiar pain and seen the beginning of the black veins that marked magical overuse, on his right hand. The wolf hand didn't seem to suffer from the same limitation, at least not yet anyways.

He could feel the same discomfort on his legs.

He was flying through the air, angry at missing a strike with his sword due to the enemy's shifting form, when he felt a lance of pain run down his left side. It ran from his shoulder all the way down his chest and onto his hip before ending.

James glanced down and searched for a split second before finding Steve. The drake had bright red blood flowing from a long laceration down his left side, matching the pain James felt. A massive spike was lanced into the ground only a few yards to the side of the drake, who had apparently been grazed by the projectile. James watched as Steve writhed in pain as James's saddle slid off of him.

He saw the creature pulling back one of its five arms, another massive spike forming at the end of it.

Steve was wide open as he recovered from the pain.

He rolled, readying a blast from his feet.

NO! He thought as he felt the energy building up.

He was too distracted to feel or see the new arrival.

THUNK!.... THUNK! THUNK! THUNK!

James's head shot up into the sky towards the source of the familiar sound.

Four projectiles impacted the golem, releasing clouds of thick white vapor that were so cold James could feel the temperature shift from where he was at.

The golem stepped back, trying to make space as glowing red eyes emerged on the top of its "head".

The flesh inside the white cloud began to freeze, frost forming all over it even as the vapor sank to the ground.

Then a fifth, and much large object plummeted down from nearly fifty feet above the golem. The griffin that had been carrying it continuing on past the site before banking.

Vickers slammed into the frozen projectile arm of the golem like something out of a superhero movie.

His ice coated fist impacted the now frozen arm of the golem like an anvil, the entire weight of the massive SEAL behind it, and lending it extra force.

James watched in awe as the outer layers of the arm shattered like glass, spraying bits of frozen golem flesh over the area like shrapnel.

Then Vickers, standing on the golem's shoulder, began unleashing a flurry of ice imbued strikes that were so fast that even James's enhanced vision could barely see them. He unleashed jabs, hooks, and even haymakers in a blur of icy fog and shattering, spraying golem flesh as he battered his way into the golem's shoulder.

The golem reeled from the sudden and unexpected viciousness of the ambush. Red eyes appearred on the golem's body in clusters as it tried to comprehend what was happening to it.

Vickers was unrelenting in his barrage of pugilistic destruction.

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"She could tell from way up there?" James asked.

"Dude. She could sense you doin' your thing from like... fifty miles away." Vickers responded.

"That's.... disturbing." James admitted. "Well. Like I said; thanks." He repeated.

"Eh. It's no big deal." Vickers said casually. "Us earth guys gotta stick together."

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One of the masters present gestured for her to speak.

"My masters. Master Patril and his subordinates have failed in their endeavor." She said, doing what she could to hide her fear. She could already feel her lungs burning from the poisonous air present. "The summoned hero was SIGNIFICANTLY more capable... and... powerful, than the reports suggested. He was capable of singlehandedly killing several of the golemmancers through sheer strength, and his drake killed several more. Master Patril initiated the congruency before he himself was slain. But unfortunately the hero was still capable of withstanding its attacks, and managed to buy himself enough time for his companions to arrive and turn battle in their favor most demonstrably."

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"They desire the vision crystal with our masters' memory of the encounter." She said before entering a coughing fit.

A moment later she stood up to see one of her fellows holding the large, jagged, pink crystal out to her.

"Send someone else." She said. "I'll die if I go back there."

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"The order was given to you." They said simultaneously. **"It is yours to obey."** Her masters paused, all of them looking to the eighth door that should have opened with theirs. **"While you are there. Inform them of our... ultimate failure."** They added. "**Our eighth, has been isolated and captured"**

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wm2zg8/wait_is_this_just_gate_204/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (203/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wk9gwm/wait_is_this_just_gate_202/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Bah Gawd! Vickers just jumped from the top rope. He damn near broke the Golem in half! Oh the humanity!

Enjoy.

\~

James had thought that the new form of the golem, or whatever it would be called now, would have been easier to deal with. It was bigger, and the spikes it threw were massive. But it was also slower, and seemed incredibly uncoordinated.

But everywhere he moved the glowing red eyes formed on its body and tracked him.

And any time he tried to attack, the massive creature would shift its form, creating holes or repositioning limbs to avoid the brunt of the damage. He was still getting little hits in, slices with his blade that devoured its flesh, blasts of black lightning and flames that charred it. But it was being kept to a minimum.

It didn't help that it was getting faster and more sure footed as the fight drew on.

The massive creature also proved more than capable of handling both James and Steve at the same time. Even as James sprinted and blasted his way around the area harassing it, it managed to engage with the massive black drake using the spike attacks. To his credit Steve seemed to realize the inherent danger in the situation and had fallen back into the thick coverage of the trees, using them to avoid direct attacks and forcing the golem to work. But the downside of this tactic was that Steve wasn't capable of directly engaging with it, not being in range to use his flames, much less to get a hold of the thing.

If there was one up side to the creature's split focus it was the fact that James was capable of scoring several direct hits on the glowing eyes with his rifle, lessening their effect minutely. But the golem learned quickly, and after James had taken five of the eyes from it it had learned to retract them any time he brought his rifle to his shoulder. James adjusted in turn, raising the rifle any time he needed to blind the creature even momentarily to buy himself time.

But he could feel himself tiring, and knew Steve was beginning to suffer the same effect.

He'd been running, casting, and fighting for what had to have been damn near half a day at this point. And that wasn't even counting the initial running skirmish before he and Steve had managed to find open ground. He'd taken to casting most of his ranged spells with his wolf hand, as he'd begun feeling the familiar pain and seen the beginning of the black veins that marked magical overuse, on his right hand. The wolf hand didn't seem to suffer from the same limitation, at least not yet anyways.

He could feel the same discomfort on his legs.

He was flying through the air, angry at missing a strike with his sword due to the enemy's shifting form, when he felt a lance of pain run down his left side. It ran from his shoulder all the way down his chest and onto his hip before ending.

James glanced down and searched for a split second before finding Steve. The drake had bright red blood flowing from a long laceration down his left side, matching the pain James felt. A massive spike was lanced into the ground only a few yards to the side of the drake, who had apparently been grazed by the projectile. James watched as Steve writhed in pain as James's saddle slid off of him.

He saw the creature pulling back one of its five arms, another massive spike forming at the end of it.

Steve was wide open as he recovered from the pain.

He rolled, readying a blast from his feet.

NO! He thought as he felt the energy building up.

He was too distracted to feel or see the new arrival.

THUNK!.... THUNK! THUNK! THUNK!

James's head shot up into the sky towards the source of the familiar sound.

Four projectiles impacted the golem, releasing clouds of thick white vapor that were so cold James could feel the temperature shift from where he was at.

The golem stepped back, trying to make space as glowing red eyes emerged on the top of its "head".

The flesh inside the white cloud began to freeze, frost forming all over it even as the vapor sank to the ground.

Then a fifth, and much larger object plummeted down from nearly fifty feet above the golem. The griffin that had been carrying it continuing on past the site before banking.

Vickers slammed into the frozen projectile arm of the golem like something out of a superhero movie.

His ice coated fist impacted the now frozen arm of the golem like an anvil, the entire weight of the massive SEAL behind it, and lending it extra force.

James watched in awe as the outer layers of the arm shattered like glass, spraying bits of frozen golem flesh over the area like shrapnel.

Then Vickers, standing on the golem's shoulder, began unleashing a flurry of ice imbued strikes that were so fast that even James's enhanced vision could barely see them. He unleashed jabs, hooks, and even haymakers in a blur of icy fog and shattering ice, spraying golem flesh as he battered his way into the golem's shoulder.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wm2xmp/wait_is_this_just_gate_204/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (202/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wjh5l3/wait_is_this_just_gate_201/)

Writer's Note: Just a reminder that this has always been a cliche Isekai story. That is all.

Enjoy.

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The two of them slammed into each other like titans from a story, James's explosive speed, deathbolt breath, and magic devouring blade allowing him to hit the golem like an uppercut to its stomach.

But the Golem was nearly fifteen feet tall before taking its wings into account, and made of some kind of stone and liquid slurry that looked like clotted blood. And it had lead with its arms and legs forward to strike at him.

James was driven back, feeling like he'd been hit by a freight train as the two of them plowed through the burning devastation of the forest, rolling over and over like fighting cats as they went.

James felt the wind get knocked out of him as the creatures arms slammed into his chest, past his sword. The Mage's Blade pierced the chest of the golem as easily as if it wasn't there, causing the magic infused flesh to hiss and sizzle before falling away. James followed up by thrashing the blade about like a fencer. His head struck the ground, missing a tree root by mere inches, and caused his vision to darken for a moment. He didn't let it disturb the blast of dark lightning pouring out of his mouth, blackening the monster's neck as it took the full force of the magic point blank.

He felt its arm latch onto his shoulder and fought to bring his sword in to sever it, but one of its legs slammed into his side, causing his breath out forcefully as he felt his ribs break there. The golem was oddly limber for being nearly three times his height.

James brought his feet up and planted them on its waist as though he was going to kick off of it, and in a way he was.

BO-BO-BO-BOOM!

He released a series of burst explosions from the soles of his feet, blasting holes from the golem's torso and pushing it back and away from him, but the hand didn't release his shoulder. Instead it seemed to tighten, and James felt the bones begin to shift and creak from the pressure.

But it didn't matter, his blasts had had the desired effect. The creatures other arm and legs had been knocked and battered backwards even as massive pieces of its torso had been incinerated.

His sword arm flashed back and up, and the shimmering edge of the Mage's Blade sliced through the golem's arm, severing it just below the spot that would be its wrist.

But James didn't stop there.

Even as the creature stumbled up and back on its suddenly unstable body, James emitted a jet of air from his right hand. It blasted ash and debris away behind him even as it lifted him up to his feet faster than he could normally stand up. Once he was vertical his feet let out

another light blast, sending him into the air even as his hand angled to the side and sent him into a spin.

He reveled in the look on the golem's face. Even without eyes he could read the shock there.

James spun like a top, his sword flashed out numerous times as he did. He watched as the first strike took off the moth-like antennae on its head, crisping them to dust as his blade drank the energy there. His second strike scored a long gash across the golem's torso, just above the already healing craters of his blast attack. His third strike severed its other arm midway up, causing it to drop to the ground.

James tucked the sword in, speeding his spin up minutely even as he raised his leg up high before bringing it down in a sort of angled axe kick. It impacted the golem's face hard enough that he feared he might break it. It sank into the semi-soft flesh of the side of the golem's head, causing the head to jerk that direction at an angle.

"You fucked up." He said as the energy in his foot built up to a crescendo.

BOOM!

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Veliry had been right about Vickers being angry.

When Telyon's griffin had first swooped down and grabbed the large man, he had flailed and cursed at them.

It had taken several minutes of yelling, and Veliry had even had to fly down next to him for a moment, to get him to understand what had happened and what the plan was. After that Vickers had calmed down and let himself sag as the griffin carried him aloft.

He checked his tablet for just a moment and read the few scant messages that command had sent him.

Apparently Choi was giving the enemy hell.

"Fuckin eh wrench monkey." He said to himself as he looked at a short clip that they'd cleaned up and sent to him. He watched Choi move like something out of a movie, marveling at the frequency of the explosions and the sheer dissarray he frequently left the cluster of clay monsters in from his rapid attacks.

He doesn't fight like one of us anymore. Not like a Soldier of our world. Now he fights like the wolf did in the bar. He realized as the clip finished. *Looks like my rifle aint gonna do much either.*

Vickers reached into his bottomless bag and pulled out the fire suppression launcher that was there, making sure to clip it to his vest before he accidentally dropped it. Once it was secure he checked to

ensure it was loaded. He only had twenty or so rounds left for it, but that'd be fine.

He held his hand up and focused on it, smiling as frost formed into spikes on his knuckles.

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Patril emerged from his room in a rage.

His face was covered in the black veins of magical overuse and backlash. He had the timid attendants throat gripped in his hand as he dragged their lifeless body.

"TELL THEM TO BEGIN THE CONGRUENCE!" He yelled at the other attendants standing outside.

They seemed to understand his fury, none of them questioning him or even hesitating before moving into action as he tossed the limp corpse aside and stormed back into his ritual room.

The attendants slipped into the rooms of their other masters, passing the message of the leader along in whispers.

Patril seated himself back at the control node roughly.

His head pounded from the damage the target had done to his golem. He had been a fool to enhance his hearing against someone so reliant on explosions for their fighting style. But he'd had no choice, having no sight otherwise. Luckily the golem's blood stone flesh had dampened the pain somewhat, but it had still been there.

He channeled back into control as another attendant silently stepped to their position behind him.

Fuck capturing him. We're going to kill this man. And I shall turn his drake into a carpet for out meeting hall.

\----------

James massaged his ankle as he caught his breath. The flyer's body was in shambles on the ground, flailing weakly as it continued succumbing to the damage he'd done to it.

He reeled as he felt a stabbing pain in his shoulder and was suddenly reminded of Steve's fight. He'd been feeling bits of pain here and there, but he'd been too caught up in his own part of the battle to pay them any mind. After all, he couldn't help Steve if he got killed himself.

He looked over and saw something that actually confused him for a moment.

Steve had been hit, that much was accurate. He could see the spike sticking out of the drake's right shoulder, even as Steve blasted fire at the attacker to little effect.

But the other golems seemed to be pulling back away from the massive lizard. As if the one that had attacked him was simply buying time for them.

What the fuck? He thought. *Are they... retreating?*

Suddenly a gravelly chatter began to rumble into being behind him.

James spun around, sword held high in preparation for an attack.

The mangled head of the golem was shaking on the remnants of its shoulders. It had a smile on its eyeless face as the bat ears sank back into the side of its head.

It was laughing.

James quickly turned to look at the other golems and was surprised to see all of them, minus the one engaged with Steve, standing in a circle, their arms interlocked.

Their bodies began to flow together.

"Good luck stopping us now." The golem behind him said menacingly.

James turned back, a look of anger on his face.

"Man, that's some dumb ass power rangers shit." He said, drawing a confused look from the golem as it attempted to knit itself back together. "Real. Fuckin'. Cheesy."

The golem tried to speak again. But James cut it off as a burst of flames jetted out of his wolf hand, empowered by a series of focused, high pressure, jets of pure oxygen from his right. These lanced holes into the battered body of the golem even as they ignited from the flames of his other hand.

A few moments later the golem was a pile of ashes and crumbled dirt.

The ground trembled from an impact behind him.

James turned back to see Steve, his prey clenched in his jaws as he tore them apart, backing away in reverse, a look of mild fear on his reptilian face.

James knew why as he looked over at the nearly fifty foot tall mass of reddish black flesh that bent and flexed as it adjusted to its new form. It took a slow, wobbly, step toward the drake before falling to a knee.

"Pffffff." James scoffed. "Not even the biggest thing I've ever killed."

He whistled loudly as he shot a blast of fire at the side of the massive creature.

A series of red glowing spots, which he knew were eyes, suddenly appeared on the side closest to him.

"Oh." He said in mild surprise. "That's.... kinda gross."

It stood up and James watched as an arm sprouted from the side of its torso towards him.

It had a massive spike at the end of it.

James began moving again, drawing his rifle back out of his bag as he did.

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Patril's body slumped over sideways as his soul died within his body.

The attendant in the room moved over to the rune on the wall nearby and powered down the ritual room before quietly exiting.

When they got outside amongst the other attendants they looked to the nearest one.

"Master Patril is gone." They said calmly. "Is the congruence in effect?"

The other attendants all nodded and they took their place among them, ready to serve as needed.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wl5w24/wait_is_this_just_gate_203/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (202/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wjh2xr/wait_is_this_just_gate_201/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: Just a reminder that this has always been a cliche Isekai story. That is all.

Enjoy.

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Despite blasting off to meet the flying golem in the air, James only managed to get five or so feet off of the ground before they impacted each other. It had been diving like a raptor before he'd even seen it, and as fast as James's reflexes were, he couldn't beat it in initiative.

The two of them slammed into each other like titans from a story, James's explosive speed, deathbolt breath, and magic devouring blade allowing him to hit the golem like an uppercut to its stomach.

But the Golem was nearly fifteen feet tall before taking its wings into account, and made of some kind of stone and liquid slurry that looked like clotted blood. And it had lead with its arms and legs forward to strike at him.

James was driven back, feeling like he'd been hit by a freight train as the two of them plowed through the burning devastation of the forest, rolling over and over like fighting cats as they went.

James felt the wind get knocked out of him as the creatures arms slammed into his chest, past his sword. The Mage's Blade pierced the chest of the golem as easily as if it wasn't there, causing the magic infused flesh to hiss and sizzle before falling away. James followed up by thrashing the blade about like a fencer. His head struck the ground, missing a tree root by mere inches, and caused his vision to darken for a moment. He didn't let it disturb the blast of dark lightning pouring out of his mouth, blackening the monster's neck as it took the full force of the magic point blank.

He felt its arm latch onto his shoulder and fought to bring his sword in to sever it, but one of its legs slammed into his side, causing his breath out forcefully as he felt his ribs break there. The golem was oddly limber for being nearly three times his height.

James brought his feet up and planted them on its waist as though he was going to kick off of it, and in a way he was.

BO-BO-BO-BOOM!

He released a series of burst explosions from the soles of his feet, blasting holes from the golem's torso and pushing it back and away from him, but the hand didn't release his shoulder. Instead it seemed to tighten, and James felt the bones begin to shift and creak from the pressure.

But it didn't matter, his blasts had had the desired effect. The creatures other arm and legs had been knocked and battered backwards even as massive pieces of its torso had been incinerated.

His sword arm flashed back and up, and the shimmering edge of the Mage's Blade sliced through the golem's arm, severing it just below the spot that would be its wrist.

But James didn't stop there.

Even as the creature stumbled up and back on its suddenly unstable body, James emitted a jet of air from his right hand. It blasted ash and debris away behind him even as it lifted him up to his feet faster than he could normally stand up. Once he was vertical his feet let out another light

blast, sending him into the air even as his hand angled to the side and sent him into a spin.

He reveled in the look on the golem's face. Even without eyes he could read the shock there.

James spun like a top, his sword flashed out numerous times as he did. He watched as the first strike took off the moth-like antennae on its head, crisping them to dust as his blade drank the energy there. His second strike scored a long gash across the golem's torso, just above the already healing craters of his blast attack. His third strike severed its other arm midway up, causing it to drop to the ground.

James tucked the sword in, speeding his spin up minutely even as he raised his leg up high before bringing it down in a sort of angled axe kick. It impacted the golem's face hard enough that he feared he might break it. It sank into the semi-soft flesh of the side of the golem's head, causing the head to jerk that direction at an angle.

"You fucked up." He said as the energy in his foot built up to a crescendo.

BOOM!

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Veliry had been right about Vickers being angry.

When Telyon's griffin had first swooped down and grabbed the large man, he had flailed and cursed at them.

It had taken several minutes of yelling, and Veliry had even had to fly down next to him for a moment, to get him to understand what had happened and what the plan was. After that Vickers had calmed down and let himself sag as the griffin carried him aloft.

He checked his tablet for just a moment and read the few scant messages that command had sent him.

Apparently Choi was giving the enemy hell.

"Fuckin eh wrench monkey." He said to himself as he looked at a short clip that they'd cleaned up and sent to him. He watched Choi move like something out of a movie, marveling at the frequency of the explosions and the sheer dissarray he frequently left the cluster of clay monsters in from his rapid attacks.

He doesn't fight like one of us anymore. Not like a Soldier of our world. Now he fights like the wolf did in the bar. He realized as the clip finished. *Looks like my rifle aint gonna do much either.*

Vickers reached into his bottomless bag and pulled out the fire suppression launcher that was there, making sure to clip it to his vest before he accidentally dropped it. Once it was secure he checked to

ensure it was loaded. He only had twenty or so rounds left for it, but that'd be fine.

He held his hand up and focused on it, smiling as frost formed into spikes on his knuckles.

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Patril emerged from his room in a rage.

His face was covered in the black veins of magical overuse and backlash. He had the timid attendants throat gripped in his hand as he dragged their lifeless body.

"TELL THEM TO BEGIN THE CONGRUENCE!" He yelled at the other attendants standing outside.

They seemed to understand his fury, none of them questioning him or even hesitating before moving into action as he tossed the limp corpse aside and stormed back into his ritual room.

The attendants slipped into the rooms of their other masters, passing the message of the leader along in whispers.

Patril seated himself back at the control node roughly.

His head pounded from the damage the target had done to his golem. He had been a fool to enhance his hearing against someone so reliant on explosions for their fighting style. But he'd had no choice, having no sight otherwise. Luckily the golem's blood stone flesh had dampened the pain somewhat, but it had still been there.

He channeled back into control as another attendant silently stepped to their position behind him.

Fuck capturing him. We're going to kill this man. And I shall turn his drake into a carpet for our meeting hall.

\----------

James massaged his ankle as he caught his breath. The flyer's body was in shambles on the ground, flailing weakly as it continued succumbing to the damage he'd done to it.

He reeled as he felt a stabbing pain in his shoulder and was suddenly reminded of Steve's fight. He'd been feeling bits of pain here and there, but he'd been too caught up in his own part of the battle to pay them any mind. After all, he couldn't help Steve if he got killed himself.

He looked over and saw something that actually confused him for a moment.

Steve had been hit, that much was accurate. He could see the spike sticking out of the drake's right shoulder, even as Steve blasted fire at the attacker to little effect.

But the other golems seemed to be pulling back away from the massive lizard. As if the one that had attacked him was simply buying time for them.

What the fuck? He thought. *Are they... retreating?*

Suddenly a gravelly chatter began to rumble into being behind him.

James spun around, sword held high in preparation for an attack.

The mangled head of the golem was shaking on the remnants of its shoulders. It had a smile on its eyeless face as the bat ears sank back into the side of its head.

It was laughing.

James quickly turned to look at the other golems and was surprised to see all of them, minus the one engaged with Steve, standing in a circle, their arms interlocked.

Their bodies began to flow together.

"Good luck stopping us now." The golem behind him said menacingly.

James turned back, a look of anger on his face.

"Man, that's some dumb ass power rangers shit." He said, drawing a confused look from the golem as it attempted to knit itself back together. "Real. Fuckin'. Cheesy."

The golem tried to speak again. But James cut it off as a burst of flames jetted out of his wolf hand, empowered by a series of focused, high pressure, jets of pure oxygen from his right. These lanced holes into the battered body of the golem even as they ignited from the flames of his other hand.

A few moments later the golem was a pile of ashes and crumbled dirt.

The ground trembled from an impact behind him.

James turned back to see Steve, his prey clenched in his jaws as he tore them apart, backing away in reverse, a look of mild fear on his reptilian face.

James knew why as he looked over at the nearly fifty foot tall mass of reddish black flesh that bent and flexed as it adjusted to its new form. It took a slow, wobbly, step toward the drake before falling to a knee.

"Pffffff." James scoffed. "Not even the biggest thing I've ever killed."

He whistled loudly as he shot a blast of fire at the side of the massive creature.

A series of red glowing spots, which he knew were eyes, suddenly appeared on the side closest to him.

"Oh." He said in mild surprise. "That's.... kinda gross."

It stood up and James watched as an arm sprouted from the side of its torso towards him.

It had a massive spike at the end of it.

James began moving again, drawing his rifle back out of his bag as he did.

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Patril's body slumped over sideways as his soul died within his body.

The attendant in the room moved over to the rune on the wall nearby and powered down the ritual room before quietly exiting.

When they got outside amongst the other attendants they looked to the nearest one.

"Master Patril is gone." They said calmly. "Is the congruence in effect?"

The other attendants all nodded and they took their place among them, ready to serve as needed.

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"Holy shit." One of the soldiers present said as they saw the footage. "That's like something out of a comic book."

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As he watched there was a massive explosion centered on Choi's position. The feed skipped as its processors tried to parse the sudden change in visual and thermal data. Krick had just a split second of concern before the feed picked back up.

When it did Choi was only inches above the ground with his hand reaching out to something.

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"Jesus Christ." Krick said under his breath. The shocked statement was audible to all despite its whispered volume as he realized just how silent the room had become.

"Look at the dragon." Someone else said, drawing everyone's attention to the skirmish happening in the background. Something that would have been fascinating if it hadn't been for the superhero-like display of powers Choi had been putting on in the foreground.

Krick looked at the secondary fight just in time to see one of the golem creatures get thrown some twenty feet in the air, Choi's massive black furred drake companion having clamped it in its jaws before thrashing it about and sending it flying.

The creature hadn't even landed before it was engulfed in flames that made the camera stutter again.

Just what has he turned into over there? The General wondered as he saw Choi explosively propel himself toward the main group of enemies that were moving around the clearing.

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Patril screamed as he subconsciously clutched at his eyes.

Physically they were fine. But his connection to his golem form had caused the pain of it getting its eyes shot out by the Hero's damnable attack to transfer to him via his very soul.

The eyes were one of the few components of the golems that were susceptible to physical damage. Magic was capable of a lot, but recreating the complex visual organs was something that was not easy to accomplish. For ease, and cost saving, most golems had eyes that had been harvested from living creatures. Theirs were from griffins, granting them some of the best vision in the world. Typically they could protect the eyes by withdrawing them into the bodies of the golems, like they had for the drake's fire attack. But the weapons the hero was using had the ability to penetrate that flesh easily, and had scored direct attacks on the soft, vulnerable, organs.

The hero had picked up on that weakness quickly after it had swiped one of Patril's out with his clawed hand.

What was worse was that unlike the rest of the golem's blood stone crafted body, they wouldn't reassemble or repair.

"Master. Is all well?" His new attendant asked with a hint of fear.

Patril turned to them with a snarl.

"DOES ANYTHING ABOUT ME SCREAMING AND CLUTCHING MY EYES STRIKE YOU AS OKAY?!?" He chastised them. As he turned to them they saw the black veins in and around his red and puffy eyes. He hated to admit that he could barely see them through the haze of the magical damage.

The attendant took a step back.

"Do..." They stammered. "Do you need to be withdrawn master?" They asked. He wondered if this was a new attendant to the Agency, or if they just weren't cut out for this work.

"NO!" He yelled back even as he placed his hands back on the mound of golem flesh that allowed his connection.

"Yes master." They said feebly as they resumed their former position near the door. He would have to talk to Navim about this one's future when this was over.

Fine. He thought as he felt his soul siphoning into the golem again. *The hard way.* He focused some magical energy into it, to use an old trick that his former golemmancy master had taught him decades before.

He flowed into a world of darkness, his golem form having gotten confused at its blindness while he'd been away.

He continued pouring magic into it through his soul bond.

The golem's began to form four large protrusions on its head.

Two large, bat-like, ears began to form on the side of its head. At the same time as long stems protruded from the top of its head before they spread, flatting like fans before splitting into a series of fine hairs that feathered out to the sides.

His golem stood up, listening to the clash of the hero, his drake, and its fellow golems some fifty yards away.

It walked over to the wing the hero had cut from its back only moments before and absorbed it into itself.

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James moved through the throng of golems like a dervish.

He used his explosions to keep himself moving at speed, and to keep his opponents spaced out, with occasional blasts of wind from his off hand to redirect or speed up. His wolf arm, no longer aching, was gripping the mage's blade like a vice as he spun, dipped, cartwheeled, leaped and, most importantly, cut his way through the group of monsters.

Each strike from the Mage's Blade bit deep, doing more damage than almost anything except his eye attacks had done. He made sure to sprinkle those into the mayhem as well, occasionally running his blade across the faces of the golems to try to score strikes against the vulnerable spots.

He felt the air grow hot and heard the telltale rumble of Steve's impending breath attack and leapt up into the air, spinning end over end like an Olympic gymnast, leaving the golems confused just as a swathe of black tinged fire washed over them.

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until the combination of heat and magical death energy made its form begin crumbling to nothingness.

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Then it was on him.

BOOOOOM!!!

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Veliry sat atop the startlingly soft griffin, gripping the waist of one of Alixan's faster riders as they flew together.

Her magical senses reached out in the direction they were traveling as she sat in a trance.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (200/?)

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Writer's note: [*play this real quick on a separate tab*](https://youtu.be/OFr74zI1LBM)

TWO HUNDRED CHAPTERS!!!!!!!

But real talk. Really happy to be here. Looking forward to whatever our favorite super powered forever specialist (don't let the bars fool you) gets up to.

Some of y'all have pointed out that with all his combined skill sets, James should be a crazy powerhouse.

Someone shoulda gave that memo to the Agency.

[*Now watch as our boy shines.*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqWRaAF6_WY)

Enjoy.

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When James met the golems in combat he did so well ahead of Steve. That was intentional. He didn't even want Steve in this fight. So he'd used his explosive flying style to rush ahead like a rocket as soon as he'd seen the flying golem ignore his rifle shots.

From his previous encounter with the Agency, Vickers had theorized that the golem he'd dealt with was being controlled. He'd told them about how the golem had seemed lax and idle whenever its eyes hadn't been glowing, but had seemed much more attentive and aggressive whenever they were. Veliry had confirmed that most golems either operated under their creator's control, or by a preset set of commands.

James didn't know whether the golems in front of him were being controlled, or simply running on some kind of programming.

He didn't care.

They were here for a fight, and he intended to give them one.

Whatever the case was they, or the people controlling them, clearly didn't know about his speed.

James's eyes glowed with reflex enhancing vision as he hurtled toward them, sword in his right hand, chain whip wrapped around the his wolf-like left arm.

The golems closest to him tried to jump out of the way, their glowing inhuman eyes widening in what he thought was shock as they realized how rapidly he'd gotten to them.

His blade bit deep into the neck of the first golem he attacked. He hadn't had too many opportunities to use the blade in the previous fight in the forest. Steve was a bit too big and the blade was just a normal length sword, so he'd only gotten a few light hits in with it before. But they'd been effective enough, and the Mage's Blade had practically begged for more, wanting to go back to the golems each time.

It proved just as magic thirsty, practically dragging back at James's arm as he continued rocketing past the now confused group of monstrosities. But he'd grown used to the sword's appetite, and knew that it would change direction in only a moment as he neared his real target, the flyer.

He landed startlingly lightly, only barely touching down with his lead leg long enough to push off and flip over, his already abused right leg complaining the whole way. He felt the blade begin pulling toward where he was going just as he released another explosion from the landing foot,

sending him cartwheeling through the air at speed before another blast stabilized him.

He had another split second of enhanced vision to see the flyer's seemingly shocked expression as it realized what he was doing. It tried to pull away. But it was too late, and too slow, as the sword stabbed into its shoulder while James continued flying over it and between its beating wings.

He didn't release the sword, but instead gripped it even tighter as he let another blast push him past the flying golem. The result caused the sword to tear its way out of the flyer's shoulder by angling upward, ripping through the remaining "flesh" of its body before ripping its way out.

James landed some fifty yards past the now confused and slightly scattered group of constructs as a series of small, controlled, blasts stabilized him before he touched the ground. The flyer slammed to the ground, gripping its mangled shoulder as it picked itself up and looked at him with what he thought was anger.

"You the Agency?" James asked, pointing the Mage's Blade at them as the last few scraps of magically imbued golem bits melted off of it, their magical energy devoured by the blade's enchantment.

The flyer snarled as the other golems moved to stand next to it. James watched as the flyer's shoulder knit itself back together from whatever material the creatures were made of.

"If so, then I gotta ask; didn't you get my warning back when you were inside my head?" He said with a smile that could have been considered manic. "Or maybe the one that my guy Vickers gave you with that lil brick of C4?" He brought his back and up, into an attacking position. "You're fucking with the wrong person."

BOOM!

And he was in the air again.

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Vickers was having a great time on his run. And he was making great time too.

He'd passed the first of the small, outlying villages that were outside of the capital roughly two hours back. He didn't know the exact distance, but he knew that on the trip out, that journey had taken a full day and a half to get to. He'd just done it in five hours. He didn't know how fast the odd horse/monster creatures Trelen had brought with him had been pulling the carriage that had set the trip's pace. But he knew he was going way faster.

He was surprised that he didn't feel winded yet. He knew he could run a long distance even normally. He knew that this world had imbued almost

every cell in his body with some kind of ambient magical energy. It was believed to be the reason they couldn't safely go home yet. But as a result he could run faster, jump higher, lift more, and hit harder.

But he hadn't really expected it to enhance his stamina, even though logically that made sense. The realization that he could probably run until the sun exploded was a bit of a mind boggler to him.

He vaulted over a section of road that was bogged down with mud as he continued running.

He just had to hope Choi could hold out for a while longer.

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James groaned as he slammed into the ground, rolling once before catching his feet and sliding the last few yards.

Before he could think, and let the pain into his mind, he spun and blasted off again, sword angled out and chain whip trailing behind him.

Steve had learned from the first encounter and knew not to stay near the main group of golems. Instead he'd slammed into one with his entire weight as it had been distracted by James. James had felt the impact as if he'd just tried to tackle someone made of stone. But Steve had succeeded in knocking the golem onto its face and had then latched onto its back with his massive jaws and carried the thing away at great effort, blasting flames out of his mouth and around the golem in the process.

James dug his sword into the side of one of the flailing golems as he flew, using the resistance and a few controlled blasts from his feet to re-angle his momentum. Another blast sent him flying off almost at a right angle as he ripped the blade from the creature's chest. He blasted himself into a rapid spin just in time to bring the blade around to his open side and deflect an incoming spike that had been thrown by one of the others. He stopped it in time, but it was a close thing.

And they were figuring out his speed.

But they weren't figuring out his plan.

Still trailing the chain, James cut into another golem and once again re-angled himself, cutting into another golem and causing the spiked end of his chain whip to dig into the first one with its spiked links.

James rolled under the swinging arm of a third one and adjusted his plan minutely. He leapt up into the air once he was past it, let off a tiny blast to send him backwards just a few feet, dropped down, sprung off of the ground and blasted back in the direction he'd originally come from.

He gripped the handle of his chain whip with both hands as he rolled so that he was holding it behind him.

BOOM!

He flew even faster than before, angled up and away from the golems that were now entangled in the chain's spiked length.

The chain slammed them into each other as it pulled taut. He heard several of them release odd noises that he thought might have been roars of anger.

But he wasn't done.

He landed on the ground, ignoring the other golems that were already moving toward him, though he did notice several moving toward Steve as he continued savaging his prey as he dragged it away.

He used his magically enhanced strength to keep the chain taut as he positioned himself. But the golems were significantly stronger than he was, and he could feel himself being pulled off balance.

So he went with that.

James leaped up off the ground and laid flat, his feet slamming into each other and locking onto the chain.

BOOM!... BOOM! BOOM! BOOOOOM!

The first blast had pulled the chain back a few feet, causing the entangled golems to stagger where they were.

The second blast had pulled them hard enough to cause one of them to arch its head back and begin roaring again.

The third and fourth blasts had done what James had hoped as the chain had suddenly lost tension.

He watched with a smile as the chain first dug into the golems' flesh, then had begun to pull THROUGH it.

By the time he rolled over backwards and landed on his feet the chain was completely slack, the golems now on the ground behind him in multiple pieces. He jerked the chain back, spinning it as he did, and brought its spiked end to him.

To his surprise, and disgust, the golems were still moving, even torn to pieces.

But another of the thrown spikes interrupted his somewhat lessened celebration as he moved to dodge out of its way.

He began channeling wind magic out of his left arm as he began charging at the nearest of the whole golems, which was only twenty or so yards away and closing. His chain began to move as if alive, the wind magic causing it to coil and writhe like a snake, even as he brought his sword up to meet an incoming projectile.

He'd just managed to intercept the foot long spike of golem flesh when James felt a piercing pain in the right side of his rib cage. His eyes shot down in surprise only to find nothing there.

He blasted into the air, leaving the encroaching attacker behind as he scanned over and saw that Steve was now engaged with the two golems that had chased him down to pursue him as he'd been dragging, clawing, and burning the one in his mouth.

One of them had thrown a spike that was now embedded in Steve's side almost halfway.

James moved his leg out at an angle and blasted again, sending him crashing down toward them like a meteor.

He lashed out with the whip as he flew, using his wind magic to get it to the target before he arrived. It slammed into the non-throwing golem and immediately began wrapping around its neck like a boa constrictor. He didn't know if these things needed to breath, but if they did that one would begin choking any time now. Just as he began pulling on the chain he slammed into the arm of the other golem, his sword leading the way.

He sliced its throwing arm clean off at the elbow, sending it flying away in front of him with a spray of dark fluids as he impacted the ground. But James didn't stop there.

He immediately began running around as fast as he could, getting the chain wrapped around the second one even as the first began struggling with the spiked weapon wrapped around its throat.

"Drop it boy!" He shouted at Steve who snarled as he did just that, letting the charred remains of the golem in his mouth drop to the ground. To James's joy, the creature appeared to be completely dead. He leaped into the air past Steve, running the chain between his still open jaws as he flew.

"PULL!" He yelled as he clambered up Steve's side with the last few yards of chain whip in his hand.

He'd never used that command with Steve before. After all, he wasn't exactly a pack animal, and Steve didn't exactly seem to understand what it meant. Then he thought of the game they'd played with a few of the carcasses he'd fed the massive lizard.

"TUG!" He yelled instead.

Steve understood immediately.

Unlike the last time, there was no real delay in the effect of the attack. Steve was many times larger than the golems, significantly stronger than James, and he had what was effectively four wheel drive.

The chain dug through their flesh and left them in ragged, flailing, pieces on the ground as it freed itself from their bodies.

James pulled Steve to turn and face the other golems and his jaw dropped as he did.

The golems that he'd left behind were already advancing on them. But two of them had stayed behind, and were reassembling the three golems that he'd dismembered with his chain. As he watched, the reformed golems began to aide in their own rebuilding, and before he knew it they were standing on their feet again, and turning to join their comrades.

"Well, shit." He said. He looked down at the mess he and Steve had just made at the same time as the drake did. Apparently Steve had noticed the same thing. "Burn these ones to a crisp like that first one you took down boy." He said to the agitated dragon-kin. "Napalm."

Steve got the message and began dousing the two destroyed golems in his black tinged fire breath.

James leaped off of Steve's back just as the flying golem took to the sky again.

As he flew the chain began writhing again. His sword pulled him forward, eager to devour more golem flesh.

And James began releasing inky, dark blue, bolts of lightning from his mouth as if he was a dragon of his own. Just like he'd done against the elemental.

BOOM!

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The doors slammed open as Amina ran in to the strategy room.

She was only mildly surprised by the fact that the communication hub from Earth had been brought in. She was pleasantly surprised to see Alixan still present as he and her father turned to look at her, startled by her violent entrance.

"Have you heard of what's happening with James?" She asked as she strode up to join them at the table. "Have we dispatched troops to his aid?"

"I've informed them of his message." General Krick said from his screen.

"And I've already sent the members of my talon to his location." Alixan said. "Plus the capital's third."

"And the fifth and sixth are already on their way to Jadesport to bolster the defenses and get a visual on the blight, respectively." King Farrick added before going back to the maps they had been looking at.

"Veliry and Marcos are with the third." Alixan whispered as she stepped up next to him.

"How bad is the damage to the watch camp?" She asked as she looked at the data that the General had printed off for them regarding the explosion.

"Most of the watch camps were destroyed outright." One of the soldiers, a captain, said as he handed her a smaller map of the camps. It had red marks to indicate the destroyed positions. "General Sigbert has already moved in with reinforcements armed with the Earth arrows and runestone stores."

"Good." She said as she began comparing information. "Having your talon here isn't leaving your hold too weak is it?" She asked her brother.

"No. The Orcragg is working to bolster things a bit. They know how hard we've been hit. Plus we just graduated a new class of riders before the winter hit. They should be breaking their saddles in already." He replied.

"Our last read of Choi's position showed him moving out of the forest." General Krick cut in. "We think he was trying to find open ground so he could utilize his um.... bombastic... fighting style." He paused as he looked at more data. "We're readjusting the drone network you guys set up on your way to the wolf city."

"Lunar Council City." Amina corrected absently.

"Right. Lunar Council City." Krick replied, mildly annoyed. "Our other drones show Chief Vickers moving in to intercept. Based on current estimates he should be there in.... a day?" He paused as he looked at something on his screen. "His movements are eratic. And they show him on the ground. Why isn't he flying?"

"His griffin was too exhausted." Amina replied as she rubbed her hands on her temples while reading a report. "He's on foot."

"He's-" General Krick shook his head. "Did you say he's on foot?" He asked incredulously. "He's gotta be doing eighty five. How the hell?"

"It seems that in the heat of battle against the Elemental he finally managed to hit the point of magical saturation that James was at when he sent you that recording of him running and jumping onto the castle wall." Amina said simply. "I'm surprised he didn't inform you." She said with a hint of sarcasm. She turned back to Alixan. "A day isn't fast enough. How soon will your talon get there?" She asked, ignoring the noise of General Krick speaking with some of his techs.

"I've told them to move in broken formation." He said softly. "Most of them will take about half of that time. But I have a few, Captain Toyner and a new claw named Telyon. They have variants. They should be there in a matter of hours."

Amina's brow furrowed as she thought of what that meant for James. He was facing golems, most likely from the Agency, and at least eight of them. And he had to continue doing so for at least a few more hours.

She knew he was strong. He was more powerful than even he seemed to realize. Or at least more than he seemed to be able to acknowledge.

But even the weakest of golems was still a force of nature in a fight. Their hardiness, strength, and adaptability made them a threat at almost any level. And the Agency wasn't shy about using magical items and spells that were beyond most people.

Her heart wanted nothing more than to hop on the nearest griffin, preferably while Alixan did the same, and fly back to join James.

But Vickers had been right. James had sent her ahead for a reason.

Her place was here. Leading her people against the greater threat of the blight.

She turned back to the table, and the people around it. She slid forth a troop count that she'd read.

"Have the fourth halberds and the eighth cavalry join together to recoup their losses from the previous blight incursion. If we don't have enough mounts for the halberds than they can ride back saddle to the cavalrymen. We can drill en route." She said. "Reequip our second archers with as many of the Earth arrows as we can spare. Have troop carts drawn up and ready within three days. Plus as many rune stones as we can get. They'll be the next wave of soldiers we send to reinforce Jadesport." She looked at her father who simply nodded. "And I'll go with them."

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James flew low and fast as he worked his way around the flyer. His plan was to blast the ground golems with the explosions from his feet while also spraying them with the deathbolts emitting from his mouth. While he was doing that he was also wrapping the entirety of the chain whip around the flyer as tightly as he could, and slashing it with his sword whenever he could.

He wasn't as well off as he'd been before. He had a spike sticking out of his left thigh, joining the other similar injury he'd gotten on the same leg earlier. But he knew that while long, the spikes weren't serrated or jagged, and were actually fairly narrow. So he ignored the new wound.

The flying golem didn't seem to mind the whip, though it did flail and spasm as the Mage's Blade repeatedly bit into its odd, dark flesh.

James wasn't targeting the wings this time. He needed the flyer to stay airborne so he could focus on it without the other golems being able to reach him. He'd expected the flyer to figure that out, but if it had then it didn't seem to care.

He was about to finish the last lap around the flying monstrosity, when he'd repeat the trick from earlier and pull it to pieces, when he was stopped dead in his tracks. The chain suddenly jerked to a halt, practically ripping his arm out of its socket despite its now werewolf-like strength.

He began to fall for a moment as his momentum was unexpectedly cancelled, and he was about to emit another blast to get back on track, when he was suddenly jerked up and back.

Towards the flyer.

Then he saw the chain in its massive hand.

And he saw the other arm stretched out in front of it, one of the foot long spikes gripped in its hand.

James just barely had enough time to pull his arm up between him and the sharp weapon, releasing the handle of the chain whip in the process.

"AAAAAAGH!" He yelled in pain as the spike stabbed clean through his hand.

Then the flyer's other hand dropped the length of chain it had been holding and clamped onto his neck. James immediately felt his throat being crushed.

It began speaking in a deep, gravelly, voice that sounded like rocks being ground in some kind of machine.

"The Agency shall have its vengeance upon you, your allies, and eventually your whole world James Choi."

"You got..." He wheezed out through gritted teeth as everything started to narrow. "the wrong-"

It pulled him in closer, momentarily loosening its grip as it shifted, though not enough for his liking.

"We know you are the one we desire. No games." It said, bits of some kind of green saliva splattering against his cheek as it spoke.

"I was gonna say." He replied as he felt something shifting in his neck that he was pretty sure wasn't meant to shift. "You got..." He let out a small gurgling noise as his throat continued being squeezed. He squinted his right eye shut so he could focus on looking the golem in the eye with his left. "The wrong hand."

The golem's head tilted in confusion. Then it looked at the hand that had the spike in it.

James's wolf hand.

It looked back at him just in time for James to flex his left hand, shattering the spike. He swung the clawed appendage at the golem's face, raking across its eyes and ripping one of them completely out of its head. It released James in surprise.

James fell for a moment as his consciousness rushed back into focus. A small part of his brain wondered why he hadn't hit the ground yet when they'd only been twenty feet or so off the ground.

Then he got things back in focus.

He rolled over as fast as he could and was shocked to see that he was almost two hundred feet off the ground now. The flyer had lifted both of them off of the ground and had apparently been prepared to drop his unconscious body.

Steve was fighting down below.

He felt something move on his hand and looked down to see the eyeball, which was no longer glowing red, stuck on the nail of one of his clawed fingers. It looked more like an actual eye than he'd expected. That gave him an idea even as it disgusted him.

"Ew!" He exclaimed before focusing energy in the hand and burning it away with fire.

He looked back down and saw the other golems pressing in on his partner. He switched the Mage's Blade to his wolf hand, marveling at how little the still open wound hurt. Then he drew his pistol from its holster and flicked the safety off.

"I'm comin' boy." He said to himself.

BOOM!

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Patril snarled from where he was sitting.

The nerve of that out-worlder, that interloper.

He clutched at his eyes even though he knew that they were uninjured. That was the downside of golemmancy. In order to be in direct control you had to put your soul on the line, binding it to the golem regardless of where you were.

"Are you alright?" Asked one of the attendants in the room with him. Their job was to pass messages from one controller to the others and to ensure that his body was cared for while he was doing this. But also to pull him out if anything occurred that might jeopardize the ritual room.

"I'M FINE!" He snapped at them.

The attendant didn't balk at the outburst, they were professionals after all, and strong casters in their own right.

He calmed himself. He needed to get back in control. He took a deep breath.

"Who has been lost so far?" He asked, forcing calm back into his voice.

"Masters Inwyth and Dray't have both lost their golems. However Dray't was capable of severing the connection before it occurred." The attendant replied calmly.

Two of their Blood Stone golems destroyed, and one of their controllers with them? How could this single man and his pet drake accomplish such a feat?

"Inform the Doors that their information about the Summoned Hero is VASTLY outdated and incomplete." Patril hissed at the attendant. "The outworlder is significantly more powerful than they lead us to believe."

"They will inquire as to whether or not you believe you can still complete the task sir." The Attendant said in return.

Patril turned and glared at the attendant. "And you shall inform them that I shall. Then you shall remain there until I send for you."

Despite the implied death sentence, the attendant showed no sign of fear or hesitation at the command.

"As you say master." They replied before calmly exiting the room and being replaced by another attendant.

Patril heard a scream reverberate through the wall.

Malaki's golem must have just taken a terrible injury if HE'S screaming. He thought.

He turned back to the piece of golem flesh sitting in his lap and placed his hands on it as he entered the trance necessary to resume the connection.

He'd finish this task or die trying.

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James landed by slamming the Mage's Blade down directly into the head of the golem nearest to Steve. He rammed the blade in up to its hilt, using his own body weight to press it in. The impact made his teeth rattle, but it also forced the golem to its knees and startled the others around it.

Before they could react his right hand flashed up and he fired his pistol faster than he ever had before, his enhanced reflexes and movement speed causing it to cycle so fast that he was fairly certain it was at its mechanical limit.

When he'd fired at them before, the bullets had practically been ignored. But that was when he hadn't known their weakness.

This time most of the rounds impacted on their eyes, causing the red glow to die in each one that he shot.

He unleashed bursts, his finger moving too fast for him to switch targets. It was a mistake, he knew, but it was one he could rectify on the next magazine. Either way, three of the nearest golems lost their eyes before they'd even realized he was there.

He wrenched the blade sideways as hard as he could with his wolf hand, nearly severing the head of the golem he was standing on and leaving it hanging at an odd angle as the creature staggered forward.

James jumped up onto Steve again.

"NAPALM!" He commanded, and Steve unleashed his breath attack again as he reloaded.

He looked up as a shadow fell over in him.

Just in time for the now one eyed flyer to slam into him. It bore him to the ground with bone breaking force, literally as James felt his sword arm crack and the blade flew out of his grip. Steve was likewise knocked onto his side, his flames momentarily aiming upwards into the sky as his aim was thrown off from the impact.

"Enough tricks boy!" It snarled at him as it brought its arm back to hit him.

"It wasn't a trick!" He yelled back. "My arm is goddam public knowledge! But how 'bout this?!?"

James breathed deathbolts directly into the golem's face even as his newly reloaded pistol pressed against its knee and unloaded its entire magazine point blank.

BOOM!

James skidded across the dirt, grass and melted snow, and out from under the now toppled golem leader, leaving a trail of smoking ground and a small crater behind him before rolling to a stop.

He tried to stand up on shaky legs before falling back to a knee. His arm throbbed from the break that had his hand hanging limply. He set the pistol down for a moment as he looked over at where the flyer was already beginning to pick itself up.

He grabbed his wolf arm by the wrist.

He gritted his teeth. "Eeergh." He groaned. "This is gonna suck."

He took a deep breath.

And set the broken fur coated arm.

"FFFFFFUCK!" He yelled through his clenched teeth.

But the regenerative properties of the arm were already getting to work, and the pain began to fade almost immediately.

James picked up his pistol and dropped the magazine. He gingerly placed it in his opposite armpit and pressed a new magazine into the grip. Then he grabbed it and slammed the bottom of the mag against his leg. He hit the switch on the side and the slide snapped shut, chambering a round in the process.

"Round three bitch." He said as he stood up again and began running toward the flyer.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (200/?)

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He had another split second of enhanced vision to see the flyer's seemingly shocked expression as it realized what he was doing. It tried to pull away. But it was too late, and too slow, as the sword stabbed into its shoulder while James continued flying over it and between its beating wings.

He didn't release the sword, but instead gripped it even tighter as he let another blast push him past the flying golem. The result caused the sword to tear its way out of the flyer's shoulder by angling upward, ripping through the remaining "flesh" of its body before ripping its way out.

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Vickers was having a great time on his run. And he was making great time too.

He'd passed the first of the small, outlying villages that were outside of the capital roughly two hours back. He didn't know the exact distance, but he knew that on the trip out, that journey had taken a full day and a half to get to. He'd just done it in five hours. He didn't know how fast the odd horse/monster creatures Trelen had brought with him had been pulling the carriage that had set the trip's pace. But he knew he was going way faster.

He was surprised that he didn't feel winded yet. He knew he could run a long distance even normally. He knew that this world had imbued almost every cell in his body with some kind of ambient magical energy. It was believed to be the reason they couldn't safely go home yet. But as a result he could run faster, jump higher, lift more, and hit harder.

But he hadn't really expected it to enhance his stamina, even though logically that made sense. The realization that he could probably run until the sun exploded was a bit of a mind boggler to him.

He vaulted over a section of road that was bogged down with mud as he continued running.

He just had to hope Choi could hold out for a while longer.

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James groaned as he slammed into the ground, rolling once before catching his feet and sliding the last few yards.

Before he could think, and let the pain into his mind, he spun and blasted off again, sword angled out and chain whip trailing behind him.

Steve had learned from the first encounter and knew not to stay near the main group of golems. Instead he'd slammed into one with his entire weight as it had been distracted by James. James had felt the impact as if he'd just tried to tackle someone made of stone. But Steve had succeeded in knocking the golem onto its face and had then latched onto its back with his massive jaws and carried the thing away at great effort, blasting flames out of his mouth and around the golem in the process.

James dug his sword into the side of one of the flailing golems as he flew, using the resistance and a few controlled blasts from his feet to re-angle his momentum. Another blast sent him flying off almost at a right angle as he ripped the blade from the creature's chest. He blasted himself into a rapid spin just in time to bring the blade around to his open side and deflect an incoming spike that had been thrown by one of the others. He stopped it in time, but it was a close thing.

And they were figuring out his speed.

But they weren't figuring out his plan.

Still trailing the chain, James cut into another golem and once again re-angled himself, cutting into another golem and causing the spiked end of his chain whip to dig into the first one with its spiked links.

James rolled under the swinging arm of a third one and adjusted his plan minutely. He leapt up into the air once he was past it, let off a tiny blast to send him backwards just a few feet, dropped down, sprung off of the ground and blasted back in the direction he'd originally come from.

He gripped the handle of his chain whip with both hands as he rolled so that he was holding it behind him.

BOOM!

He flew even faster than before, angled up and away from the golems that were now entangled in the chain's spiked length.

The chain slammed them into each other as it pulled taut. He heard several of them release odd noises that he thought might have been roars of anger.

But he wasn't done.

He landed on the ground, ignoring the other golems that were already moving toward him, though he did notice several moving toward Steve as he continued savaging his prey as he dragged it away.

He used his magically enhanced strength to keep the chain taut as he positioned himself. But the golems were significantly stronger than he was, and he could feel himself being pulled off balance.

So he went with that.

James leaped up off the ground and laid flat, his feet slamming into each other and locking onto the chain.

BOOM!... BOOM! BOOM! BOOOOOM!

The first blast had pulled the chain back a few feet, causing the entangled golems to stagger where they were.

The second blast had pulled them hard enough to cause one of them to arch its head back and begin roaring again.

The third and fourth blasts had done what James had hoped as the chain had suddenly lost tension.

He watched with a smile as the chain first dug into the golems' flesh, then had begun to pull THROUGH it.

By the time he rolled over backwards and landed on his feet the chain was completely slack, the golems now on the ground behind him in multiple pieces. He jerked the chain back, spinning it as he did, and brought its spiked end to him.

To his surprise, and disgust, the golems were still moving, even torn to pieces.

But another of the thrown spikes interrupted his somewhat lessened celebration as he moved to dodge out of its way.

He began channeling wind magic out of his left arm as he began charging at the nearest of the whole golems, which was only twenty or so yards away and closing. His chain began to move as if alive, the wind magic causing it to coil and writhe like a snake, even as he brought his sword up to meet an incoming projectile.

He'd just managed to intercept the foot long spike of golem flesh when James felt a piercing pain in the right side of his rib cage. His eyes shot down in surprise only to find nothing there.

He blasted into the air, leaving the encroaching attacker behind as he scanned over and saw that Steve was now engaged with the two golems that

had chased him down to pursue him as he'd been dragging, clawing, and burning the one in his mouth.

One of them had thrown a spike that was now embedded in Steve's side almost halfway.

James moved his leg out at an angle and blasted again, sending him crashing down toward them like a meteor.

He lashed out with the whip as he flew, using his wind magic to get it to the target before he arrived. It slammed into the non-throwing golem and immediately began wrapping around its neck like a boa constrictor. He didn't know if these things needed to breath, but if they did that one would begin choking any time now. Just as he began pulling on the chain he slammed into the arm of the other golem, his sword leading the way.

He sliced its throwing arm clean off at the elbow, sending it flying away in front of him with a spray of dark fluids as he impacted the ground. But James didn't stop there.

He immediately began running around as fast as he could, getting the chain wrapped around the second one even as the first began struggling with the spiked weapon wrapped around its throat.

"Drop it boy!" He shouted at Steve who snarled as he did just that, letting the charred remains of the golem in his mouth drop to the ground. To James's joy, the creature appeared to be completely dead. He leaped into the air past Steve, running the chain between his still open jaws as he flew.

"PULL!" He yelled as he clambered up Steve's side with the last few yards of chain whip in his hand.

He'd never used that command with Steve before. After all, he wasn't exactly a pack animal, and Steve didn't exactly seem to understand what it meant. Then he thought of the game they'd played with a few of the carcasses he'd fed the massive lizard.

"TUG!" He yelled instead.

Steve understood immediately.

Unlike the last time, there was no real delay in the effect of the attack. Steve was many times larger than the golems, significantly stronger than James, and he had what was effectively four wheel drive.

The chain dug through their flesh and left them in ragged, flailing, pieces on the ground as it freed itself from their bodies.

James pulled Steve to turn and face the other golems and his jaw dropped as he did.

The golems that he'd left behind were already advancing on them. But two of them had stayed behind, and were reassembling the three golems that

he'd dismembered with his chain. As he watched, the reformed golems began to aide in their own rebuilding, and before he knew it they were standing on their feet again, and turning to join their comrades.

"Well, shit." He said. He looked down at the mess he and Steve had just made at the same time as the drake did. Apparently Steve had noticed the same thing. "Burn these ones to a crisp like that first one you took down boy." He said to the agitated dragon-kin. "Napalm."

Steve got the message and began dousing the two destroyed golems in his black tinged fire breath.

James leaped off of Steve's back just as the flying golem took to the sky again.

As he flew the chain began writhing again. His sword pulled him forward, eager to devour more golem flesh.

And James began releasing inky, dark blue, bolts of lightning from his mouth as if he was a dragon of his own. Just like he'd done against the elemental.

BOOM!

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The doors slammed open as Amina ran in to the strategy room.

She was only mildly surprised by the fact that the communication hub from Earth had been brought in. She was pleasantly surprised to see Alixan still present as he and her father turned to look at her, startled by her violent entrance.

"Have you heard of what's happening with James?" She asked as she strode up to join them at the table. "Have we dispatched troops to his aid?"

"I've informed them of his message." General Krick said from his screen.

"And I've already sent the members of my talon to his location." Alixan said. "Plus the capital's third."

"And the fifth and sixth are already on their way to Jadesport to bolster the defenses and get a visual on the blight, respectively." King Farrick added before going back to the maps they had been looking at.

"Veliry and Marcos are with the third." Alixan whispered as she stepped up next to him.

"How bad is the damage to the watch camp?" She asked as she looked at the data that the General had printed off for them regarding the explosion.

"Most of the watch camps were destroyed outright." One of the soldiers, a captain, said as he handed her a smaller map of the camps. It had red marks to indicate the destroyed positions. "General Sigbert has already

moved in with reinforcements armed with the Earth arrows and runestone stores."

"Good." She said as she began comparing information. "Having your talon here isn't leaving your hold too weak is it?" She asked her brother.

"No. The Orcragg is working to bolster things a bit. They know how hard we've been hit. Plus we just graduated a new class of riders before the winter hit. They should be breaking their saddles in already." He replied.

"Our last read of Choi's position showed him moving out of the forest." General Krick cut in. "We think he was trying to find open ground so he could utilize his um.... bombastic... fighting style." He paused as he looked at more data. "We're readjusting the drone network you guys set up on your way to the wolf city."

"Lunar Council City." Amina corrected absently.

"Right. Lunar Council City." Krick replied, mildly annoyed. "Our other drones show Chief Vickers moving in to intercept. Based on current estimates he should be there in.... a day?" He paused as he looked at something on his screen. "His movements are eratic. And they show him on the ground. Why isn't he flying?"

"His griffin was too exhausted." Amina replied as she rubbed her hands on her temples while reading a report. "He's on foot."

"He's-" General Krick shook his head. "Did you say he's on foot?" He asked incredulously. "He's gotta be doing eighty five. How the hell?"

"It seems that in the heat of battle against the Elemental he finally managed to hit the point of magical saturation that James was at when he sent you that recording of him running and jumping onto the castle wall." Amina said simply. "I'm surprised he didn't inform you." She said with a hint of sarcasm. She turned back to Alixan. "A day isn't fast enough. How soon will your talon get there?" She asked, ignoring the noise of General Krick speaking with some of his techs.

"I've told them to move in broken formation." He said softly. "Most of them will take about half of that time. But I have a few, Captain Toyner and a new claw named Telyon. They have variants. They should be there in a matter of hours."

Amina's brow furrowed as she thought of what that meant for James. He was facing golems, most likely from the Agency, and at least eight of them. And he had to continue doing so for at least a few more hours.

She knew he was strong. He was more powerful than even he seemed to realize. Or at least more than he seemed to be able to acknowledge.

But even the weakest of golems was still a force of nature in a fight. Their hardiness, strength, and adaptability made them a threat at almost

any level. And the Agency wasn't shy about using magical items and spells that were beyond most people.

Her heart wanted nothing more than to hop on the nearest griffin, preferably while Alixan did the same, and fly back to join James.

But Vickers had been right. James had sent her ahead for a reason.

Her place was here. Leading her people against the greater threat of the blight.

She turned back to the table, and the people around it. She slid forth a troop count that she'd read.

"Have the fourth halberds and the eighth cavalry join together to recoup their losses from the previous blight incursion. If we don't have enough mounts for the halberds than they can ride back saddle to the cavalrymen. We can drill en route." She said. "Reequip our second archers with as many of the Earth arrows as we can spare. Have troop carts drawn up and ready within three days. Plus as many rune stones as we can get. They'll be the next wave of soldiers we send to reinforce Jadesport." She looked at her father who simply nodded. "And I'll go with them."

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James flew low and fast as he worked his way around the flyer. His plan was to blast the ground golems with the explosions from his feet while also spraying them with the deathbolts emitting from his mouth. While he was doing that he was also wrapping the entirety of the chain whip around the flyer as tightly as he could, and slashing it with his sword whenever he could.

He wasn't as well off as he'd been before. He had a spike sticking out of his left thigh, joining the other similar injury he'd gotten on the same leg earlier. But he knew that while long, the spikes weren't serrated or jagged, and were actually fairly narrow. So he ignored the new wound.

The flying golem didn't seem to mind the whip, though it did flail and spasm as the Mage's Blade repeatedly bit into its odd, dark flesh.

James wasn't targeting the wings this time. He needed the flyer to stay airborne so he could focus on it without the other golems being able to reach him. He'd expected the flyer to figure that out, but if it had then it didn't seem to care.

He was about to finish the last lap around the flying monstrosity, when he'd repeat the trick from earlier and pull it to pieces, when he was stopped dead in his tracks. The chain suddenly jerked to a halt, practically ripping his arm out of its socket despite its now werewolf-like strength.

He began to fall for a moment as his momentum was unexpectedly cancelled, and he was about to emit another blast to get back on track, when he was suddenly jerked up and back.

Towards the flyer.

Then he saw the chain in its massive hand.

And he saw the other arm stretched out in front of it, one of the foot long spikes gripped in its hand.

James just barely had enough time to pull his arm up between him and the sharp weapon, releasing the handle of the chain whip in the process.

"AAAAAAGH!" He yelled in pain as the spike stabbed clean through his hand.

Then the flyer's other hand dropped the length of chain it had been holding and clamped onto his neck. James immediately felt his throat being crushed.

It began speaking in a deep, gravelly, voice that sounded like rocks being ground in some kind of machine.

"The Agency shall have its vengeance upon you, your allies, and eventually your whole world James Choi."

"You got..." He wheezed out through gritted teeth as everything started to narrow. "the wrong-"

It pulled him in closer, momentarily loosening its grip as it shifted, though not enough for his liking.

"We know you are the one we desire. No games." It said, bits of some kind of green saliva splattering against his cheek as it spoke.

"I was gonna say." He replied as he felt something shifting in his neck that he was pretty sure wasn't meant to shift. "You got..." He let out a small gurgling noise as his throat continued being squeezed. He squinted his right eye shut so he could focus on looking the golem in the eye with his left. "The wrong hand."

The golem's head tilted in confusion. Then it looked at the hand that had the spike in it.

James's wolf hand.

It looked back at him just in time for James to flex his left hand, shattering the spike. He swung the clawed appendage at the golem's face, raking across its eyes and ripping one of them completely out of its head. It released James in surprise.

James fell for a moment as his consciousness rushed back into focus. A small part of his brain wondered why he hadn't hit the ground yet when they'd only been twenty feet or so off the ground.

Then he got things back in focus.

He rolled over as fast as he could and was shocked to see that he was almost two hundred feet off the ground now. The flyer had lifted both of them off of the ground and had apparently been prepared to drop his unconscious body.

Steve was fighting down below.

He felt something move on his hand and looked down to see the eyeball, which was no longer glowing red, stuck on the nail of one of his clawed fingers. It looked more like an actual eye than he'd expected. That gave him an idea even as it disgusted him.

"Ew!" He exclaimed before focusing energy in the hand and burning it away with fire.

He looked back down and saw the other golems pressing in on his partner. He switched the Mage's Blade to his wolf hand, marveling at how little the still open wound hurt. Then he drew his pistol from its holster and flicked the safety off.

"I'm comin' boy." He said to himself.

BOOM!

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Patril snarled from where he was sitting.

The nerve of that out-worlder, that interloper.

He clutched at his eyes even though he knew that they were uninjured. That was the downside of golemmancy. In order to be in direct control you had to put your soul on the line, binding it to the golem regardless of where you were.

"Are you alright?" Asked one of the attendants in the room with him. Their job was to pass messages from one controller to the others and to ensure that his body was cared for while he was doing this. But also to pull him out if anything occurred that might jeopardize the ritual room.

"I'M FINE!" He snapped at them.

The attendant didn't balk at the outburst, they were professionals after all, and strong casters in their own right.

He calmed himself. He needed to get back in control. He took a deep breath.

"Who has been lost so far?" He asked, forcing calm back into his voice.

"Masters Inwyth and Dray't have both lost their golems. However Dray't was capable of severing the connection before it occurred." The attendant replied calmly.

Two of their Blood Stone golems destroyed, and one of their controllers with them? How could this single man and his pet drake accomplish such a feat?

"Inform the Doors that their information about the Summoned Hero is VASTLY outdated and incomplete." Patril hissed at the attendant. "The outworlder is significantly more powerful than they lead us to believe."

"They will inquire as to whether or not you believe you can still complete the task sir." The Attendant said in return.

Patril turned and glared at the attendant. "And you shall inform them that I shall. Then you shall remain there until I send for you."

Despite the implied death sentence, the attendant showed no sign of fear or hesitation at the command.

"As you say master." They replied before calmly exiting the room and being replaced by another attendant.

Patril heard a scream reverberate through the wall.

Malaki's golem must have just taken a terrible injury if HE'S screaming. He thought.

He turned back to the piece of golem flesh sitting in his lap and placed his hands on it as he entered the trance necessary to resume the connection.

He'd finish this task or die trying.

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James landed by slamming the Mage's Blade down directly into the head of the golem nearest to Steve. He rammed the blade in up to its hilt, using his own body weight to press it in. The impact made his teeth rattle, but it also forced the golem to its knees and startled the others around it.

Before they could react his right hand flashed up and he fired his pistol faster than he ever had before, his enhanced reflexes and movement speed causing it to cycle so fast that he was fairly certain it was at its mechanical limit.

When he'd fired at them before, the bullets had practically been ignored. But that was when he hadn't known their weakness.

This time most of the rounds impacted on their eyes, causing the red glow to die in each one that he shot.

He unleashed bursts, his finger moving too fast for him to switch targets. It was a mistake, he knew, but it was one he could rectify on the next magazine. Either way, three of the nearest golems lost their eyes before they'd even realized he was there.

He wrenched the blade sideways as hard as he could with his wolf hand, nearly severing the head of the golem he was standing on and leaving it hanging at an odd angle as the creature staggered forward.

James jumped up onto Steve again.

"NAPALM!" He commanded, and Steve unleashed his breath attack again as he reloaded.

He looked up as a shadow fell over in him.

Just in time for the now one eyed flyer to slam into him. It bore him to the ground with bone breaking force, literally as James felt his sword arm crack and the blade flew out of his grip. Steve was likewise knocked onto his side, his flames momentarily aiming upwards into the sky as his aim was thrown off from the impact.

"Enough tricks boy!" It snarled at him as it brought its arm back to hit him.

"It wasn't a trick!" He yelled back. "My arm is goddam public knowledge! But how 'bout this?!?"

James breathed deathbolts directly into the golem's face even as his newly reloaded pistol pressed against its knee and unloaded its entire magazine point blank.

BOOM!

James skidded across the dirt, grass and melted snow, and out from under the now toppled golem leader, leaving a trail of smoking ground and a small crater behind him before rolling to a stop.

He tried to stand up on shaky legs before falling back to a knee. His arm throbbed from the break that had his hand hanging limply. He set the pistol down for a moment as he looked over at where the flyer was already beginning to pick itself up.

He grabbed his wolf arm by the wrist.

He gritted his teeth. "Eeergh." He groaned. "This is gonna suck."

He took a deep breath.

And set the broken fur coated arm.

"FFFFFFUCK!" He yelled through his clenched teeth.

But the regenerative properties of the arm were already getting to work, and the pain began to fade almost immediately.

James picked up his pistol and dropped the magazine. He gingerly placed it in his opposite armpit and pressed a new magazine into the grip. Then

he grabbed it and slammed the bottom of the mag against his leg. He hit the switch on the side and the slide snapped shut, chambering a round in the process.

"Round three bitch." He said as he stood up again and began running toward the flyer.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wjh2xr/wait_is_this_just_gate_201/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (199.5/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wfi3q5/wait_is_this_just_gate_199/)

Writer's note: Back that garbage truck on up and tip the bucket. Cause we're at the dump.

THE LORE DUMP!

Again, this is mainly so that I can devote a bit more brainstorming/writing to chapter 200, and so that it can drop on either friday or saturday.

Ready for some..... forbidden knowledge? Relax it's only forbidden because it falls outside the scope of what any of the established characters know/bring to the story. Or it's just something they haven't had reason to reveal in their own narratives.

These aren't actual IN WORLD historical documents or anything, I'm not gonna pretend they are. They're literally just me giving you guys details so you can have some context on different things.

Anyway HEREWEGO!

Enjoy.

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Subject #1: Earth.

The Earth of the setting is vastly different than the one we know of IRL. Namely the story takes place roughly 25\~ years in the future, and society exists in the aftermath of a globally inclusive war that was primarily for control of sources of water. This escalating set of conflicts, ultimately culminating in a series of tactical nuclear detonations and numerous destroyed cities, came to be known as the Water Wars.

The Water Wars not only involved almost every country on the planet, but also drastically rearranged the borders on the maps. Numerous weaker countries were either conquered or else absorbed into their larger, stronger neighbors. On top of that, more than a few small coastline or island countries were destroyed outright.

America, home of James and more than a few other focal characters, has likewise been changed by the wars.

Most of the west coast has been destroyed by attacks from a combination of Chinese and Russian attacks, as well as raids from Polynesian Insurgents who had already had a troubled past with the U.S. Military.

Los Angeles, once the largest port in the country, was a prime target for enemy attack and was destroyed outright. All that remains is a massive, glassy, crater of irradiated land and burned superstructure. The resulting inflow of ocean water has resulted in it being called the L.A. Bay.

San Diego, a crucial military strong hold in the Water Wars, Suffered a startlingly similar fate. However the Military was able to fortify its positions there AND intercept incoming attacks effectively enough to prevent complete devastation. The once vibrant city became a deadly battlefield, with land, air, and sea battles that would last several years before culminating in a successful defense. However, only a very small civilian population is left in what is now one of the strongest Military Posts on the West Coast.

Seattle followed San Diego's lead and fortified itself almost beyond recognition, attempting to hold off attacks from the same militaries. But a well placed nuclear strike from a Chinese submarine resulted in a lack of viable options for transporting land goods to support the besieged city, resulting in one of the costliest sieges in the war. To the surprise of their attackers, Seattle prevailed, and ever since its citizens carried great pride in the resolve they showed.

San Francisco remained remarkably untouched throughout the war. Many people think that this may be a result of the large population of Chinese Immigrants that were known to live in the city before hostilities became open, however that has never been confirmed. Whatever the case most Americans, especially Water War veterans, look at San Fransisco with intense suspicion to this day. More than a few bar fights have broken out over the subject.

Moving away from the west coast. The center of America was called upon as it hadn't been since World War Two. Farms were devoted to producing mass quantities of food and materials both to support the war effort, and to feed and clothe the civilian population that was rapidly fleeing inland from the coasts to escape the violence and devastation. Factories popped up seemingly overnight to produce everything from weapons and armor for the troops, to cots and instant shelters for refugees.

Many cities in the central states were overwhelmed by the influx of refugees and became massive shanty towns that have yet to recover. But several, like Denver, Topeka, and Minneapolis managed to adapt to the change. Most impressive was Detroit. Once the butt of jokes for its crime rate, deserted buildings, failed economy, and poor living quality, the Motor City saw the biggest resurgence. Once empty buildings were filled with new residents. Plants and factories were brought to life to produce

what they'd once produced en masse, vehicles. Vehicles from the newly repopulated Detroit became the backbone of the military's mobile forces. Even in the aftermath of the war, Detroit has clung to its renewed title as the Motor City.

The east coast, while not as devastated as the west, was still devastated by the war. While opposing forces, such as the somewhat allied Russian and Chinese navies were capable of engaging in strikes on the coast, most of their western (our eastern) focus was on holding off the combined forces of the European and African Alliance forces. However America still came under attack from the two Communist states, as well as attacks from, of all places, South America. This multi direction conflict was largely rebuffed by the incredibly condensed forces of the various military bases on the east coast, though it did ultimately result in nuclear strikes against New York, Florida, and most devastatingly Washington D.C.

The Water Wars lasted the better part of two decades for the U.S., starting in the late 2020's and for some countries lasting well into the 2040's, only seeing a decline in combat once numerous nuclear strikes across the globe took several former super powers to the brink of actually utilizing M.A.D. and wiping the planet clean of livable land.

This escalation, and increasing civilian deaths and their resulting riots ultimately brought the war to its end. Each nation being forced to choose between either continuing to fight, and risking their governmental dissolution as a result Or ceasing the violence, and turning inward to repair their damage, and utilize newfound technologies to attempt a recovery. Not all of them were capable of doing so, and several countries saw massive reforms into new governmental organizations, the most drastic of which was the massive number of southeast Asian countries that ended up conglomerating as they pushed back against both American AND Chinese control as well as solidified their hold on the ocean around their borders.

Current America, where a lot of our characters are from and work for, is a vastly different country than we currently know. Some parts look like 40k hive cities, while other parts look like they've been ripped straight from a fallout game. For many, like James and a lot of the desert team, joining the military was the best way to ensure themselves a future that didn't require fighting for every scrap of food and drop of water they could get.

\[Writer's note: That should give you guys a good idea of the world James and the Earth gang came from. It's incomplete, as I'm not a Poli-Sci major or anything. Plus, you really only need to know how this stuff fits into James's back story. Since he's kinda the main character if you haven't noticed. And it is kind of the KEY difference between OUR world and theirs. Anyways, moving on.\]

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Subject #2: The world of Petravus.

For the record, the world of Petravus doesn't actually have a name. The people there understand the concept of celestial bodies AKA planets and moons and things. And they have named those things, just like we have (RIP Pluto, you're still a planet to me buddy). But they haven't named their planet, typically simply referring to is as "The World". IDK what yall expected here. We call our planet "Dirt".

\-Sub-subject: Were-folk.

There's tons of were-folk the world over. Probably a few million during the point of time the story is set in.

Wolves ARE the most populous of them. As mentioned in recent chapters, primarily because their instincts are a bit harder for them to control during their youthful years, resulting in more incidental bites. AGAIN, unsancioned bites/infections are **SUPER TABOO** amongst were-folk

A were-folks truest weakness is SILVER. Though they can also be killed via; beheading, incineration, crushing, and basically anything that's going to cause massive damage on a level that will overwhelm their regenerative ability. Yall saw Kela get literally disemboweled and she lived, so you know.... it takes a lot... to get past that.

Also there's a spell, that's super old, and wont come into play in the story. Certain rare, high power, casters know it. The Lunar Council knows it for REASONS. But it is possible to cut a were-person off from the moon's power. Resulting in them being reverted to their non beast form and being INCREDIBLY weakened for the rest of their lives. (Think, fire-lord once he lost his bending. ATLA rules!)

That being said, HERE'S A LIST OF ALL THE BEAST TYPES THAT HAVE A WERE-FOLK FORM (or at least our world's equivalent) arranged from most common to rarest.

1. Wolves
2. Lions
3. Tigers
4. Boars
5. Foxes
6. Jaguars/Panthers
7. Giraffes (They're a touch different though. Probably not gonna elaborate.)
8. Gorillas (Typically red or gold furred.)
9. Squirrels (including rare "flying" variants)
10. Bears
11. Deer
12. Golden Eagles
13. Lynxes
14. Tapirs (Actually thought to be extinct, though that's not confirmed.)
15. Pangolin (Currently only 1 exists.)

\-Sub-Subject #2: MAGIC (I know yall want more details on that)

The simplest way to explain Magic in this setting is to say that it is THE PUREST version of mind over matter.

It taps into the ambient magical energy that infuses every aspect of the world, from the world itself, the more mundane energies that we Earth type folk would know, thermal, hydro, wind, electricity, all that stuff. But also on more esoteric energies such as death, the moon, the soul of the person casting >!(or being sacrificed, but that's a surprise tool that we'll need later)!< And as such a person who gets good at drawing in this energy *Cough Cough JAMES Cough Cough* can become very powerful very quickly.

Once energy has been drawn in a skilled mage/caster can basically do (to a limited extent) anything they can imagine. However they DO have to imagine it in relation to their own body and location. Also, the more complex and powerful the spell the more energy is required to pull it off.

THE BIG LIMITATION ON MAGIC.... is the fact that certain powers clash with numerous factors in the world around the person casting them. These factors can include things like; rules put in place by gods/other more powerful entities, other magical effects in the area, chemical substances in the area, whether or not other casters are drawing from the same energy source, and of course basic physics (Sorry, but James is never gonna explode his way to light speed. Yeah, I know, it'd be dope as hell.)

Now, the workaround for these limitations is rituals and material aides. Believe it or not, Everyone's favorite little red headed mage is actually afraid of heights. This puts a huge damper on her ability to use her flight magic because it gets all up in her visualization process. That's why she has the magical tattoos on her legs. They act like energy stabilizers for those times when she gets inside her own head and freaks out, and basically keep her from falling to her death. They also allow her to fly faster on less energy, cause (quoting Vickers here) she's wicked smaht.

But that's a very mundane, minimal, example of material aides for magic. What about rituals?

Well, rituals are basically a caster's way of asking the gods/forces of nature to let them break rules for a spell. The most obvious examples of this idea are Kela's transformation into a champion, which drew the Moon Goddess's attention directly AND... James getting Steve bonded to his soul. Soul alteration magic like that is super difficult and watched over by an CURRENTLY unnamed extra-dimensional deity. But the tattoo and the bonding process of actually taming a dragon-kin is used as a sort of combo of physical material, physical pain, and a show of courage from the attempted rider. Plus it does have the caveat of shared pain and the drake dying if its rider does.

\-Sub-Subject #Tres: The Deep Dark

Now I don't wanna SPOIL too much. But very soon we are going to get a much more in depth look at this mysterious realm.

It is pretty much just the Great Value Brand ^(TM) version of the Underdark from D&D. I'm not even gonna deny it.

However where the Underdark is primarily run by dark elves and their spider/drider simpy boiz. The deep dark is actually mostly run by the monsters inhabiting it. What few bastions of "Civilization" exist in the deep are primarily just defensive strong holds chosen for their ability to either hide from the monsters, or give a massive defensive advantage to whoever is in control of it.

The most common denizens of the deep dark are Deep Orcs, Dwelfs (Google it), goblins, Yarbogs (Basically spiny hobgoblins), and of course Dark Elves.

I will say that Dark Elves are actually homies. They're like, the one faction in the Deep Dark that aren't INHERENTLY evil. Don't get me wrong, their elves, they're gonna be judgmental, but... they're alright. They've also got some other stuff going on that we'll get to later.

Then of course there's the fact that THE AGENCY likes to set its most secretive of locations in the deep dark. That said, as Vickers and the Petravian investigators/mages found out. THEY BUNKER UP HAAAAARD. If Vickers hadn't been walking behind an undead MS PAINT erase tool he wouldn't have gotten to where he was going. Not many things can.

Also, some of y'all were right about the Agency's little meeting room/treasury. It was full of poisonous gas that was heavier than normal air, and the whole place was designed to keep that stuff trapped there. Funny thing is. It wouldn't have killed Vickers. Least not for a few more months. Yall know enough to know why. Just gotta think about it.

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That's all I got for you guys in this INFODUMP chapter. We'll be resuming tomorrow and MAYBE Saturday. Chapter 200 (yay me) is gonna be FIGHT NIGHT!

And if yall think James was OP before, just remember that in most of the fights he's been in up until now, he's been either too weak (magically) or too inexperienced to actually use his full skill set.

That aint gonna be the case in this next chapter. Shit's gonna go off the rails.

Queue up whatever anime sakuga scene music you want. Or heavy metal. Or hardcore, OG West Coast (none of that weak ass east coast garbage) gangster rap you like to listen to during fight sequences and boss fights.

Because that same thing I said about James's fighting style..... is gonna be applied to my fight scene writing style.

Looking forward to writing it guys. Still have no idea when we're gonna replace the question mark in the title numbers.

[\[Back to the story\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wiurmu/wait_is_this_just_gate_200/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (199/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/weqx7f/wait_is_this_just_gate_198/)

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Enjoy.

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Vickers had blasted a series of rounds into the head and chest of the one he'd dealt with and dropped it immediately.

These ones were clearly made of something tougher. He'd already loosed several rounds from his pistol at one, only for them to bounce off of its hard exterior, leaving little more than chips on the things hide. He'd quickly holstered the pistol in favor of his magic.

On top of that, Steve's flames had done little more than blacken the one that James had unleashed him upon first. It had still fallen back, but only for a moment.

Now he was dealing with eight of the damned things.

James and Steve ran, hoping to get away from the massive, armored, damage resistant monstrosities and their glowing eyes. He'd expected them to be slow. They were golems after all, anyone who'd ever played any kind of fantasy game knew that golems were slow, tough, tank monsters.

These things apparently hadn't gotten the message on the first part.

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But there'd been nothing he could do, so he'd simply ordered Steve to keep going, despite his anger at the opponent.

Then the golems had begun sprinting, and they had NOT been slow.

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>sosambush by golems like agency thing1 day from reaching gald-whatever village on way to castlegoing to continue tocpitalwill avoid village8 aholes 1 of em flys.bullets/fire not working.on runhelp.

He was temporarily distracted as one of the golems got next to him and Steve and swung its massive limb out at him.

He focused his magic on his eyes and the arm slowed to a crawl as his right hand rose up, leaving the rifle hanging from its strap. He began lowering back and away from the attack, counting on his saddle to hold him on as he practically laid flat.

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At first it was just the two buzzes to indicate an incoming text. He slowed Tom down a bit so he could check it, but before he could it began rapidly buzzing with call.

"What's going on?" Amina asked curiously from behind him.

"I don't know." He admitted as he pulled the device out of his saddle bag.

"Go ahead and land while you're at it." She said, pointing over his shoulder at one of the city guard posts. "I can get a griffin there and we can let Tom rest for a bit." Vickers nodded as he absently angled Tom down toward the post.

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"What the hell?" He asked as he hit the green button.

Colonel Muhammed was on the camera, it lagged a bit as the tablet struggled with its weak connection.

"Vickers where are you?" She asked.

"Just getting to the capital ma'am. Choi and I split up so I could rush the princess here." He replied. "What's going on?"

She looked at Amina, whose head was over his shoulder to look at the tablet. She switched to English.

"\[Choi is in trouble. Some kind of ambush. He said that he was about a day from some...\]" She looked at one of the techs in the room. "\[Gaaaldwaesh village?\]" She said hesitantly. "\[Something like that. Apparently his weapons are proving ineffective and he's on the run. How fast can you get there?\]"

"\[Two days.\]" Amina responded before Vickers could. At the Colonel's shocked expression she added. "\[It's rude to intentionally cut someone out of a conversation Colonel.\]"

The Colonel clenched her jaw before resuming in Petravian.

"Regardless. He's in trouble." She said, just as Tom touched down. "He needs help, he's even asked for it himself."

"Shit." Vickers said as Amina hopped off of Tom's back. Tom immediately sank down to the ground and began panting.

"You there. Sergeant!" Amina shouted at the guards that were already rushing over. "You have griffins right?"

"Aye General!" The soldier in question, a fish scaled man responded with a salute.

"Fetch one and bring it here, saddled and ready!" She commanded. "And bring some feed and water for this one!"

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"I got him ma'am. Let me just button some stuff up here." He said to the tablet.

"Double time it chief." The Colonel responded before cutting her feed.

"Eh. I can do a little better than double." Vickers said as he pulled out the fire suppression launcher and a pouch full of rounds for it and transferred them to his own bottomless bag. Then he reached into the saddlebag again and pulled out several familiar white bricks. He kissed one before also putting them in his bag.

A few moments later he walked over to Amina who was speaking to the Sergeant again as one of the other soldiers was walking over the requested griffin.

"Aight princess. This is where we part ways. Get Tom back to the stables for me yeah?" He said as he checked the chamber on his pistol and stretching his legs.

"What?" She asked as she looked at him confused. "What are you talking about?"

Vickers let out a quick sigh as he continued stretching.

"Choi sent you with me so you could get back here faster and respond to whatever is going on with the weird shit." He said with a hint of exasperation. "So, that's what's gonna happen. Get to the capital. I got Choi."

"You don't even know what you're heading into." She said. "And he's nearly two days away by griffin. Also, WHY are you stretching?"

"Because I aint takin' a griffin." He replied. "Also, heading into shit I don't know about is literally what I'm trained for. Plus I know more about what I'm heading into than you do. They're more of those weird golem things I already killed one of. At least according to Choi's message. And this time," He paused as he pulled out his rifle and checked it's magazine. "I aint tryin to be stealthy about it." Satisfied with the rifle's status, he put it back in it's bottomless bag. He actually liked that idea, though he wouldn't admit it to Choi.

Before she could respond Vickers was sprinting, as fast as she'd seen James run, back the direction they'd just come from.

"Are you going with him ma'am?" The Sergeant asked, reminding her of his presence.

She looked back to see him holding the reins of the griffin.

She was conflicted.

On the one hand her people needed her. Her father and the troops needed her. There was a disaster near Jadesport.... again. And the Blight was active again.

But on the other hand James was in danger..... also again. And if it was from some kind of golem like Vickers had implied, then that also implied the Agency being involved. After all, Golems weren't natural occurrences.

"Is Prince Alixan still in the city?" She asked.

"Believe so General." The Sergeant replied. "But I'm not certain."

She took the reins from him.

"Get that griffin taken care of and take him to the castle stables as soon as you can." She said as she mounted the new one. Send word that there's an attack of some kind near Geyldwsh Village. Mobilize any guards in the area."

"Aye ma'am." The Sergeant said as he ran to the nearby building that was their watch post.

Amina took to the air and flew to the castle.

She had to trust James to be as powerful and lucky as he had proven to be so far.

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Vickers wasn't actually certain of his newfound speed. He'd seen Choi run a few times before and knew that he could go damn near fast enough to be highway legal.

He had no illusions that he was faster than a griffin either. But the idea of riding any griffin other than Tom just felt like a betrayal of their bond. He knew that was foolish, but human emotions were finicky like that.

He also knew that in terms of stamina, Choi would smoke him. It was odd to acknowledge that. But Choi was a marathon runner. Vickers was too, but he'd only ever done one marathon and it had just been to say he did it, and he'd felt like dying after. Whereas Choi had done them recreationally.

That said, Vickers was, in his own terms, hauling ass.

While he had to admit that Choi could beat him in stamina when it came to running. Vickers was built for speed. He'd always been quick off the line back in his younger, sports focused, days. And that trend had continued after his military career had started.

He couldn't be sure, but he thought that his newfound, magically enhanced, speed was getting him up to almost eighty miles per hour.

I'm on my way ya little grunt. He thought as he flew past a wagon of some kind, startling its driver.

\----------

Typically if James was in a fight, he'd want to find some cover or concealment. That was just Army combat training 101 when you were engaged.

But James wasn't fighting like a soldier. He was fighting with a mixture of magic, and swipes of his Mage's blade.

Oh, and he was riding on the back of a forty foot tall, fire breathing, lizard.

So cover and especially concealment weren't really options.

Instead he needed to do something at least mildly illogical and get these things out in the open. Steve was just fast enough that he'd managed to pull away from the massive creatures, minus the flying one, which had yet to move in and engage. But Steve couldn't ESCAPE them. They were keeping up just enough that as long as they coordinated, which they seemed preternaturally good at, they could still get the occasional hit in.

The attacks took all their effort, and seemed to favor simply punches, slams, and grab attempts. But they would rotate. Whenever one of them slowed long enough to attempt an attack, another would come flying in from a different direction.

James had to let the mages blade point him towards whichever one was coming in. It's hunger to devour sources of magic that were targeting him meant that it was constantly pulling his sword hand towards incoming attacks. His wolf hand was doing a good job of keeping a hold of it. Whenever it would pull in a different direction James would turn that way and hit the attacker with deathbolts or blasts of air if they were in a tree.

His eyes glowed with the magic of his reflex enhancing vision, making the creatures look as though they were moving only about two thirds of their normal speed.

Even still, they were getting closer.

He needed to find an open field to remove some of their mobility, and get them where his rifle might be able to track them easier. He'd had to

let it hang after he'd realized that he had too many targets in too many directions for it to be effective in the thick foliage of the forest as they moved. But the one burst of shots he had gotten off had at least proven deadlier to the creatures. One of them had an arm hanging limply at its side, having taken three rounds to its shoulder and chest.

Unfortunately, that hadn't stopped the golem from continuing to attack.

James tilted to the side, kicking on the left side a bit to get Steve to follow. Steve quickly jumped sideways, narrowly dodging a slam attack from one of the golems as it leaped at them from a tree on the side James hadn't been looking at.

Steve instinctively spun, whipping his tail at the creature to try and knock it over. But his tail stopped dead and he roared in anger as James felt an impact on his own tail bone.

"AAAGH!" He yelled. "No more slams boy!" He shouted at Steve as he kicked him back into movement and simultaneously hit the golem with deathbolts. The outer skin, or maybe it was chitin he wasn't sure, scorched and blackened where they hit. But the golem didn't seem to mind too much as it recovered from its attack.

James turned and sent a blast of air scything out at a tree that one of the golems was jumping toward, cutting its limbs off and sending the golem skidding as it landed on a tree that didn't have any holds for it.

Then he saw light.

He kicked Steve towards the light, knowing that it had to be the edge of the forest.

He cried out in pain as he felt a phantom pain in his shoulder and looked back to see what looked like a spike sticking out of Steve's shoulder. It wasn't big, but it was definitely a new attack that the creatures hadn't been using before.

He looked up and saw one of the monsters standing a few yards away, it was pulling its arm back as if it was going to throw something.

James instinctively grabbed the rifle and let loose a burst just as the golem released its attack.

His three rounds slammed into the throwing arm, hoping to cripple it and prevent more of the ranged attacks.

James's enhanced vision saw the nearly foot long spike, seemingly made out of the golem's own body mass, flying toward them.

He tried to kick Steve into motion. But he knew it was too late.

Pain exploded in his mind as the spike slammed into his calf, impaling it and also pinning it to Steve's ribs.

Steve and James both spasmed as they both took double doses of the pain the attack inflicted.

Then a massive fist slammed into Steve's ribs on the other side, missing James's OTHER leg only because of how the drake had bucked from the spike.

James felt a pain that he was certain had broken his ribs on the matching side.

"RIDE!" He yelled, kicking with the only good leg he had left. "FUCK!"

He dropped the rifle again and lashed out with the foot that was on the side that had just been slammed.

BOOM!

An explosion emanated from the foot, and for the first time James saw one of the attackers actually get thrown back, landing on its back. He felt pain shoot through his leg as the violent recoil of the detonation, usually used to propel him through the air, wrenched his knee violently into Steve's side.

Then as Steve continued running for the light, James watched the golem slowly pick itself back up, seemingly unscathed.

As Steve finally got to the clearing James gripped the spike in his leg, wincing as Steve's movement jostled it sending pain coursing up the limb, and wrenched it out with his wolf hand.

Blood spurted from the, startlingly neat, hole in his leg. James dropped the, luckily narrow, spike and an amber glow engulfed his wolf hand as he poured healing magic into the leg. Slowly, the blood flow slowed, until eventually it stopped entirely.

He knew he would need more healing than that. But for now, simply not bleeding out would be fine. Steve needed healing more, and he quickly transitioned the healing spell over to the drakes side.

He felt his sword pulling against where it was resting under some of the packing on his saddle and turned to see something concerning.

The flying golem was finally moving in.

At least now they were in the open. James hoped that was the right move as he grabbed his rifle again and swiveled to try and get a shot on the massive, winged, monstrosity.

But it was gone.

In fact, he didn't see any of the creatures.

"What the fuck?" He asked.

And then Steve skidded to a halt. James turned to see what was happening.

"Well, shit." He said to himself.

Standing only a few hundred yards or so in front of him, were the entire contingent of golems. In fact, he thought that there might've even been a few extra. The flyer was flapping its wings as it hovered above them.

And they all looked good as new.

The flyer's eyes flared, their red glow intensifying.

And they all began charging towards him simultaneously.

James slid off of Steve's saddle, drawing a confused look from the winded drake.

"Stay here boy." He said as he patted Steve's side. "In fact." He said as he looked at the drakes confused face. "Better yet, head back to the capital. Get to safety."

Steve continued looking at him. James slapped him on the side.

"Go." He said softly. "I got this."

Steve looked back at the approaching golems. Then back at James. His neck puffed out for a moment and he blew piping hot air at James, ruffling his hair. Then he turned back forward and James felt the heat rise around him as his chest began to rumble.

"Alright then. Stay." James said, realizing that that was what Steve meant to do. "But don't fuckin die on me."

The Golems were already halfway.

"I gotta stop gettin into shit like this." He said to himself as he raised the rifle and sighted the first target. The rifle's cross-hairs settled on the flyer's face.

James squeezed the trigger.

[\[Lore Dump Chapter\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wgdz40/wait_is_this_just_gate_1995/) [\[Next Actual Chapter\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wiurmu/wait_is_this_just_gate_200/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (199/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wequxr/wait_is_this_just_gate_198/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: LET'S GET READY TO RRRUUUUUMMMMBBBLLLLEEEE!!!!

Enjoy.

^(PS: If you have ACTUAL criticism, I'm all ears. If you're just being a jerk I will shut that shit down. Most of y'all are chill in this regard. Also, this goes for any story/writer, not just me and mine. I do this because I enjoy it. And that's the only reason I NEED to continue doing it.)

^(Alright. Soapbox over. Back to the story.)

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>sos
>
>ambush by golems like agency thing
>
>1 day from reaching gald-whatever village on way to castle
>
>going to continue tocpital
>
>will avoid village
>
>8 aholes 1 of em flys.
>
>bullets/fire not working.
>
>on run
>
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it's magazine. "I aint tryin to be stealthy about it." Satisfied with the rifle's status, he put it back in it's bottomless bag. He actually liked that idea, though he wouldn't admit it to Choi.

Before she could respond Vickers was sprinting, as fast as she'd seen James run, back the direction they'd just come from.

"Are you going with him ma'am?" The Sergeant asked, reminding her of his presence.

She looked back to see him holding the reins of the griffin.

She was conflicted.

On the one hand her people needed her. Her father and the troops needed her. There was a disaster near Jadesport.... again. And the Blight was active again.

But on the other hand James was in danger..... also again. And if it was from some kind of golem like Vickers had implied, then that also implied the Agency being involved. After all, Golems weren't natural occurrences.

"Is Prince Alixan still in the city?" She asked.

"Believe so General." The Sergeant replied. "But I'm not certain."

She took the reins from him.

"Get that griffin taken care of and take him to the castle stables as soon as you can." She said as she mounted the new one. Send word that there's an attack of some kind near Geyldwsh Village. Mobilize any guards in the area."

"Aye ma'am." The Sergeant said as he ran to the nearby building that was their watch post.

Amina took to the air and flew to the castle.

She had to trust James to be as powerful and lucky as he had proven to be so far.

\----------

Vickers wasn't actually certain of his newfound speed. He'd seen Choi run a few times before and knew that he could go damn near fast enough to be highway legal.

He had no illusions that he was faster than a griffin either. But the idea of riding any griffin other than Tom just felt like a betrayal of their bond. He knew that was foolish, but human emotions were finicky like that.

He also knew that in terms of stamina, Choi would smoke him. It was odd to acknowledge that. But Choi was a marathon runner. Vickers was too, but

he'd only ever done one marathon and it had just been to say he did it, and he'd felt like dying after. Whereas Choi had done them recreationally.

That said, Vickers was, in his own terms, hauling ass.

While he had to admit that Choi could beat him in stamina when it came to running. Vickers was built for speed. He'd always been quick off the line back in his younger, sports focused, days. And that trend had continued after his military career had started.

He couldn't be sure, but he thought that his newfound, magically enhanced, speed was getting him up to almost eighty miles per hour.

I'm on my way ya little grunt. He thought as he flew past a wagon of some kind, startling its driver.

\----------

Typically if James was in a fight, he'd want to find some cover or concealment. That was just Army combat training 101 when you were engaged.

But James wasn't fighting like a soldier. He was fighting with a mixture of magic, and swipes of his Mage's blade.

Oh, and he was riding on the back of a forty foot tall, fire breathing, lizard.

So cover and especially concealment weren't really options.

Instead he needed to do something at least mildly illogical and get these things out in the open. Steve was just fast enough that he'd managed to pull away from the massive creatures, minus the flying one, which had yet to move in and engage. But Steve couldn't ESCAPE them. They were keeping up just enough that as long as they coordinated, which they seemed preternaturally good at, they could still get the occasional hit in.

The attacks took all their effort, and seemed to favor simple punches, slams, and grab attempts. But they would rotate. Whenever one of them slowed long enough to attempt an attack, another would come flying in from a different direction.

James had to let the mages blade point him towards whichever one was coming in. It's hunger to devour sources of magic that were targeting him meant that it was constantly pulling his sword hand towards incoming attacks. His wolf hand was doing a good job of keeping a hold of it. Whenever it would pull in a different direction James would turn that way and hit the attacker with deathbolts or blasts of air if they were in a tree.

His eyes glowed with the magic of his reflex enhancing vision, making the creatures look as though they were moving only about two thirds of their normal speed.

Even still, they were getting closer.

He needed to find an open field to remove some of their mobility, and get them where his rifle might be able to track them easier. He'd had to let it hang after he'd realized that he had too many targets in too many directions for it to be effective in the thick foliage of the forest as they moved. But the one burst of shots he had gotten off had at least proven deadlier to the creatures. One of them had an arm hanging limply at its side, having taken three rounds to its shoulder and chest.

Unfortunately, that hadn't stopped the golem from continuing to attack.

James tilted to the side, kicking on the left side a bit to get Steve to follow. Steve quickly jumped sideways, narrowly dodging a slam attack from one of the golems as it leaped at them from a tree on the side James hadn't been looking at.

Steve instinctively spun, whipping his tail at the creature to try and knock it over. But his tail stopped dead and he roared in anger as James felt an impact on his own tail bone.

"AAAGH!" He yelled. "No more slams boy!" He shouted at Steve as he kicked him back into movement and simultaneously hit the golem with deathbolts. The outer skin, or maybe it was chitin he wasn't sure, scorched and blackened where they hit. But the golem didn't seem to mind too much as it recovered from its attack.

James turned and sent a blast of air scything out at a tree that one of the golems was jumping toward, cutting its branches off and sending the golem skidding as it landed on a tree that didn't have any holds for it.

Then he saw light.

He kicked Steve towards the light, knowing that it had to be the edge of the forest.

He cried out in pain as he felt a phantom pain in his shoulder and looked back to see what looked like a spike sticking out of Steve's shoulder. It wasn't big, but it was definitely a new attack that the creatures hadn't been using before.

He looked up and saw one of the monsters standing a few yards away, it was pulling its arm back as if it was going to throw something.

James instinctively grabbed the rifle and let loose a burst just as the golem released its attack.

His three rounds slammed into the throwing arm, hoping to cripple it and prevent more of the ranged attacks.

James's enhanced vision saw the nearly foot long spike, seemingly made out of the golem's own body mass, flying toward them.

He tried to kick Steve into motion. But he knew it was too late.

Pain exploded in his mind as the spike slammed into his calf, impaling it and also pinning it to Steve's ribs.

Steve and James both spasmed as they both took double doses of the pain the attack inflicted.

Then a massive fist slammed into Steve's ribs on the other side, missing James's OTHER leg only because of how the drake had bucked from the spike.

James felt a pain that he was certain had broken his ribs on the matching side.

"RIDE!" He yelled, kicking with the only good leg he had left. "FUCK!"

He dropped the rifle again and lashed out with the foot that was on the side that had just been slammed.

BOOM!

An explosion emanated from the foot, and for the first time James saw one of the attackers actually get thrown back, landing on its back. He felt pain shoot through his leg as the violent recoil of the detonation, usually used to propel him through the air, wrenched his knee violently into Steve's side.

Then as Steve continued running for the light, James watched the golem slowly pick itself back up, seemingly unscathed.

As Steve finally got to the clearing James gripped the spike in his leg, wincing as Steve's movement jostled it sending pain coursing up the limb, and wrenched it out with his wolf hand.

Blood spurted from the, startlingly neat, hole in his leg. James dropped the, luckily narrow, spike and an amber glow engulfed his wolf hand as he poured healing magic into the leg. Slowly, the blood flow slowed, until eventually it stopped entirely.

He knew he would need more healing than that. But for now, simply not bleeding out would be fine. Steve needed healing more, and he quickly transitioned the healing spell over to the drakes side.

He felt his sword pulling against where it was resting under some of the packing on his saddle and turned to see something concerning.

The flying golem was finally moving in.

At least now they were in the open. James hoped that was the right move as he grabbed his rifle again and swiveled to try and get a shot on the massive, winged, monstrosity.

But it was gone.

In fact, he didn't see any of the creatures.

"What the fuck?" He asked.

And then Steve skidded to a halt. James turned to see what was happening.

"Well, shit." He said to himself.

Standing only a few hundred yards or so in front of him was the entire contingent of golems. In fact, he thought that there might've even been a few extra. The flyer was flapping its wings as it hovered above them.

And they all looked good as new.

The flyer's eyes flared, their red glow intensifying.

And they all began charging towards him simultaneously.

James slid off of Steve's saddle, drawing a confused look from the winded drake.

"Stay here boy." He said as he patted Steve's side. "In fact." He said as he looked at the drakes confused face. "Better yet, head back to the capital. Get to safety."

Steve continued looking at him. James slapped him on the side.

"Go." He said softly. "I got this."

Steve looked back at the approaching golems. Then back at James. His neck puffed out for a moment and he blew piping hot air at James, ruffling his hair. Then he turned back forward and James felt the heat rise around him as his chest began to rumble.

"Alright then. Stay." James said, realizing that that was what Steve meant to do. "But don't fuckin die on me."

The Golems were already halfway.

"I gotta stop gettin into shit like this." He said to himself as he raised the rifle and sighted the first target. The rifle's cross-hairs settled on the flyer's face.

James squeezed the trigger.

[\[Lore Dump Chapter\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wgdwum/wait_is_this_just_gate_1995/) [\[Next ACTUAL chapter\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wh74de/wait_is_this_just_gate_200/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wdr8y4/wait_is_this_just_gate_197/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wfi3q5/wait_is_this_just_gate_199/)

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wdr66e/wait_is_this_just_gate_197/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wfhyc9/wait_is_this_just_gate_199/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (197/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wbgy8b/wait_is_this_just_gate_196/)

Writer's note: Ruh Roh Raggy.

Enjoy.

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"Dammit!" She hissed out in frustration as she clenched her fist and pressed it to her leg. It was a habit, a bad one, that she'd gained in the early days of her.... symptoms.

She had to focus and calm herself as she lifted the spasming hand up so she could massage and flex the tremors away.

It took a few moments, and one of the castle maids walked past with a curious look. Werner had to force herself to smile in greeting as she massaged the hand.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (197/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/wbgwwr/wait_is_this_just_gate_196/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Ruh Roh Raggy.

Enjoy.

PS: I recently posted
[*this*](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/wc4hyd/i_didnt_commission_this_i_just_found_it_just_now/) *in* r/GATEhouse *if anyone wants an idea of what Kela looked like.*

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Wait, is this just GATE? (196/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/walx1l/wait_is_this_just_gate_195/)

Writer's note: Heeeeeeyyyy! Governmental shenanigans. WooHoo!

Enjoy.

\~

"Alright lads!" Sherk yelled at the row of marching dwarves below him. Dusty had a large crate clamped into his front hands and several other crates and bundles strapped to his back. Sherk was almost crowded him out of his saddle. "Just a few more dunes and we'll be at the cartographer's camp. Then we can take a break."

The dwarves below grumbled loud enough to be heard even from where Nguyen was watching them approach. One of them actually threw what

Nguyen thought was a shovel at the slowly circling dragon, though the projectile didn't even come close to reaching the flying creature.

After a few more minutes the first of the dwarves finally made it to the camp. Dusty set down his crate a few yards away before setting down next to it, and Sherk slid over the side of the dragon.

"How's it going?" Nguyen said as he stepped forward and reached out his hand in greeting.

The dwarf, a burly grey haired dwarf extended their hand and accepted the greeting. "Nice to meet ya." They said. "Take it you're the head cartographer here?" He asked.

"Head of the expedition. But not much of a cartographer. Just.... the most level head in the group." Nguyen said truthfully. "I'm Arix. Nice to meet you too." He said, giving his new-ish cover name for this world, while also prompting the dwarf to give their name.

"Danil Dunebasher, and I can understand that." He said as he tapped his knuckles on his own head. "Sherk's told us a lot about you lot." Danil replied. "Still don't understand why the cartographers'd want a map of this sandbox." He held his hands up and looked back at his companions who were all dropping their gear and taking knees so they could drink water. "But if it gives us a spot to rest for a few hours, and friends in the desert, then I won't worry about it to much."

Nguyen gestured at the camp around him. *Now comes the smoke and mirrors.* He thought. "Well our camp is yours to wander. We'll be fixing lunch in the next hour or so, cooks are already on it. Please, kick off your boots and rest for a bit. We'll send a couple of our younger workers with you to help you get your supplies to your base camp." He looked over Danil's shoulder, easy to do with his stature, and looked at Sherk. "No sign of any Deep Dark intrusions. All's quiet on the desert front." To which Sherk nodded gratefully.

"Well." Danil said. "You aint gotta do that. But... I aint one to look a gift griffin in the beak." He turned back to the other party members. "Alright boys. You heard the man. Kick up your heels for a bit. We'll take our gear out after a bit o grub from our new friends here."

With that Danil turned and launched his pack at one of the other nearby dwarves before plopping down onto one of the crates that was next to the, former, communication tent.

One of the soldiers that Nguyen had sent out to scout out the desert, under the guise of keeping an eye on it for Sherk, had spotted the dwarves coming up the pass into the desert only a day before.

Nguyen had called everyone together and given them instructions that he'd worked out with the General after his suspicion about Sherk. Together they'd all worked together to setup the supplies that had been sent over by the staff on the other side of the door.

It had taken a lot of manual labor, more than a little bit of welding and power-tool use, and a bit of clever, and fast, work from the people on Earth. But they'd gotten the camp disguised with time to spare.

Now the camp was virtually indistinguishable from any standard camp that would be found anywhere else in this world. And none of the personnel present had even a hint of Earth technology on their person. The closest thing to technology was the various bits of magical gear that the original party had managed to gather during their travel.

Everything else was hidden in "Instant" Desert vaults. Back during his few tours in the Water Wars Nguyen had come to think of them like most soldiers who'd used em, "Pain in the ass Altoid tins". Each one took at least three hours to set up, negating the manufacturer's "Instant" claim. But once they were set up they could be placed as deep as thirty feet under the sand, with laddered tunnels that were designed to be set only a few feet under the surface of the sand. At a specific voice command, received in this case by microphones disguised as various buttons and toggles on their clothes, the tunnel would either blast compressed air out to clear the sand above it enough for the entrance to be used, or would begin vibrating to cause the sand around the entrance to collapse on top of it and hide it. Nguyen had programmed the vaults to only work with Earth language based words, assuring that only members of the team would be able to activate them.

All of their Earth gear had been placed in a series of these vaults that were hidden inside the tents that were on the surface. Additionally, the crew on Earth was currently excavating the site on their side so that they could move the doorway entrance down to match the position of the largest of the vaults, which had become the default Communication room.

The camp above was now nothing but the various colored canvas tents, furniture made of simple materials, and a series of tools and materials that would match the more or less medieval setting of the world and their cartographer group cover. Including several maps of the country and several of the major cities in the country, and one map of the desert they were in. These had all been printed based on the data Chief Vickers had given to them during his trip to the capital. Then they'd been artificially made to look old and worn out.

This was only aided by the fact that Isaacs and the Doctor had managed to procure several minor magical items that were common for travelers and adventurers, including a decanter that seemed to supply water anytime it was tipped over, despite being empty. Nguyen had a suspicion that Isaacs' idea of "procuring" things might have been a bit sketchy. But given the circumstances, he wasn't going to question it.

Nguyen made a point of showing Sherk and Danil about the camp. He apologized to Sherk for not letting him in several of the tents before, but covered for it by telling him that they hadn't quite unloaded some of their more sensitive gear at the time. He assured Sherk that he could enter any tent he wanted now, so long as he had the tent occupant's permission, though he did request that he not enter the primary cartography tent without an escort.

Danil was actually excited to see the cartography tent. Apparently he was the leader of their group not JUST because he was the level head, like Nguyen, but also because he was the only one who was proficient enough with maps to keep the group from getting lost. Nguyen promised to have a copy of the desert map made for him once it was completely updated as he ushered the dwarf into the tent.

Nguyen was pleased at the fact that neither of the dwarves seemed to realize that they were now standing directly on top of the camp's communication room.

He wasn't aware of the fact that the dwarves weren't the only ones coming to the desert to look at things.

\-------------------------

"Now comes the real test." Veliry said as she guided King Farrick to the courtyard. "I've grabbed ten of our soldiers. They come from a range of races and experience levels. Guardian Ira'Nyl even joined."

"I'm surprised you could get her away from her post." The King replied as they exited the last doorway to the courtyard. "She takes her duties very seriously."

"You don't have to tell me that." She said. "Anyways, I had a few of our baggers mock up some custom fit pieces for them. I modeled them after the ones that James uses for his weapon." She pointed at the belt she was wearing, with a triangular leather pouch on her right hip and the square one on her left hip. "I also worked on the feed mechanism, which had a habit of jamming up after five or six shots. AAAAND I worked on the recoil. Turns out that a sequentially timed propulsion engraving-"

The King silenced her with a hand. "Normal words Veliry." He said simply, having grown accustomed to the mage's accelerating speech pattern over the years. "Slow down."

"Right. Sorry sir." She said. "I made it kick, as James calls it, a lot less. I also added a rudimentary aiming sight to it. It's still not AS accurate as the weapons from Earth. But it's better than the one I showed you last week."

At this point they'd reached the small cluster of soldiers standing in the archery range. They were all curiously strapping on the belts that they'd been supplied, though a few had gotten them backwards. Ira'Nyl, ever the professional, was already properly fitted and was helping one of the younger soldiers get his "holster" on the belt correctly.

"Alright everyone!" Veliry said, getting their attention. They turned to look at her and many of them jumped to salute the king. He quickly waved at them to go back to what they were doing. "I see a lot of you have your belts on. Some of you are struggling. Guardian, good job, and thank you for helping the others. If you're struggling, follow her lead, or look at the way I'm wearing mine." She watched as they continued putting

the belts on, going faster now that they knew that Ira'Nyl had gotten hers correct.

After a few minutes Veliry told them all to form a line with each of them positioned in front of the dummies usually used for archery practice.

"So." She began, pacing in front of them and between where they stood and the dummies. "I know you're all wondering what these belts and pouches are about, and I'm glad that none of you have peeked at their contents. I know that being involved in a demonstration that's been arranged by an Arch-Mage likely has some of you nervous. But don't worry. As long as you follow my instructions, and practice a bit of caution, we should all be returning home," She nodded at Ira'Nyl. "Or to our posts, after this with all of our bits attached and the way they were when we got here."

This drew a few light chuckles, including from the King.

"That said." She continued. "The things you are testing today ARE DANGEROUS."

She reached down and pulled open the triangular pouch. From it she drew a much smaller, and much more refined, version of the weapon the King had fired the week before. She held it up above her shoulder, aimed at the sky.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (196/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/walvg9/wait_is_this_just_gate_195/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Heeeeeeyyyy! Governmental shenanigans. WooHoo!

Enjoy.

\~

"Alright lads!" Sherk yelled at the row of marching dwarves below him. Dusty had a large crate clamped into his front hands and several other crates and bundles strapped to his back. Sherk was almost crowded him out of his saddle. "Just a few more dunes and we'll be at the cartographer's camp. Then we can take a break."

The dwarves below grumbled loud enough to be heard even from where Nguyen was watching them approach. One of them actually threw what Nguyen thought was a shovel at the slowly circling dragon, though the projectile didn't even come close to reaching the flying creature.

After a few more minutes the first of the dwarves finally made it to the camp. Dusty set down his crate a few yards away before setting down next to it, and Sherk slid over the side of the dragon.

"How's it going?" Nguyen said as he stepped forward and reached out his hand in greeting.

The dwarf, a burly grey haired man, extended their hand and accepted the greeting. "Nice to meet ya." They said. "Take it you're the head cartographer here?" He asked.

"Head of the expedition. But not much of a cartographer. Just.... the most level head in the group." Nguyen said truthfully. "I'm Arix. Nice to meet you too." He said, giving his new-ish cover name for this world, while also prompting the dwarf to give their name.

"Danil Dunebasher, and I can understand that." He said as he tapped his knuckles on his own head. "Sherk's told us a lot about you lot." Danil replied. "Still don't understand why the cartographers'd want a map of this sandbox." He held his hands up and looked back at his companions who were all dropping their gear and taking knees so they could drink water. "But if it gives us a spot to rest for a few hours, and friends in the desert, then I won't worry about it to much."

Nguyen gestured at the camp around him. *Now comes the smoke and mirrors.* He thought. "Well our camp is yours to wander. We'll be fixing lunch in the next hour or so, cooks are already on it. Please, kick off your boots and rest for a bit. We'll send a couple of our younger workers with you to help you get your supplies to your base camp." He looked over Danil's shoulder, easy to do with his stature, and looked at Sherk. "No sign of any Deep Dark intrusions. All's quiet on the desert front." To which Sherk nodded gratefully.

"Well." Danil said. "You aint gotta do that. But... I aint one to look a gift griffin in the beak." He turned back to the other party members. "Alright boys. You heard the man. Kick up your heels for a bit. We'll take our gear out after a bit o grub from our new friends here."

With that Danil turned and launched his pack at one of the other nearby dwarves before plopping down onto one of the crates that was next to the, former, communication tent.

One of the soldiers that Nguyen had sent out to scout out the desert, under the guise of keeping an eye on it for Sherk, had spotted the dwarves coming up the pass into the desert only a day before.

Nguyen had called everyone together and given them instructions that he'd worked out with the General after his suspicion about Sherk. Together they'd all worked together to setup the supplies that had been sent over by the staff on the other side of the door.

It had taken a lot of manual labor, more than a little bit of welding and power-tool use, and a bit of clever, and fast, work from the people on Earth. But they'd gotten the camp disguised with time to spare.

Now the camp was virtually indistinguishable from any standard camp that would be found anywhere else in this world. And none of the personnel present had even a hint of Earth technology on their person. The closest thing to technology was the various bits of magical gear that the original party had managed to gather during their travel.

Everything else was hidden in "Instant" Desert vaults. Back during his few tours in the Water Wars Nguyen had come to think of them like most soldiers who'd used em, "Pain in the ass Altoid tins". Each one took at least three hours to set up, negating the manufacturer's "Instant" claim. But once they were set up they could be placed as deep as thirty feet under the sand, with laddered tunnels that were designed to be set only a few feet under the surface of the sand. At a specific voice command, received in this case by microphones disguised as various buttons and toggles on their clothes, the tunnel would either blast compressed air out to clear the sand above it enough for the entrance to be used, or would begin vibrating to cause the sand around the entrance to collapse on top of it and hide it. Nguyen had programmed the vaults to only work with Earth language based words, assuring that only members of the team would be able to activate them.

All of their Earth gear had been placed in a series of these vaults that were hidden inside the tents that were on the surface. Additionally, the crew on Earth was currently excavating the site on their side so that they could move the doorway entrance down to match the position of the largest of the vaults, which had become the default Communication room.

The camp above was now nothing but the various colored canvas tents, furniture made of simple materials, and a series of tools and materials that would match the more or less medieval setting of the world and their cartographer group cover. Including several maps of the country and several of the major cities in the country, and one map of the desert they were in. These had all been printed based on the data Chief Vickers had given to them during his trip to the capital. Then they'd been artificially made to look old and worn out.

This was only aided by the fact that Isaacs and the Doctor had managed to procure several minor magical items that were common for travelers and adventurers, including a decanter that seemed to supply water anytime it was tipped over, despite being empty. Nguyen had a suspicion that Isaacs' idea of "procuring" things might have been a bit sketchy. But given the circumstances, he wasn't going to question it.

Nguyen made a point of showing Sherk and Danil about the camp. He apologized to Sherk for not letting him in several of the tents before, but covered for it by telling him that they hadn't quite unloaded some of their more sensitive gear at the time. He assured Sherk that he could enter any tent he wanted now, so long as he had the tent occupant's permission, though he did request that he not enter the primary cartography tent without an escort.

Danil was actually excited to see the cartography tent. Apparently he was the leader of their group not JUST because he was the level head, like Nguyen, but also because he was the only one who was proficient enough with maps to keep the group from getting lost. Nguyen promised to have a copy of the desert map made for him once it was completely updated as he ushered the dwarf into the tent.

Nguyen was pleased at the fact that neither of the dwarves seemed to realize that they were now standing directly on top of the camp's communication room.

He wasn't aware of the fact that the dwarves weren't the only ones coming to the desert to look at things.

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"Now comes the real test." Veliry said as she guided King Farrick to the courtyard. "I've grabbed ten of our soldiers. They come from a range of races and experience levels. Guardian Ira'Nyl even joined."

"I'm surprised you could get her away from her post." The King replied as they exited the last doorway to the courtyard. "She takes her duties very seriously."

"You don't have to tell me that." She said. "Anyways, I had a few of our baggers mock up some custom fit pieces for them. I modeled them after the ones that James uses for his weapon." She pointed at the belt she was wearing, with a triangular leather pouch on her right hip and the square one on her left hip. "I also worked on the feed mechanism, which had a habit of jamming up after five or six shots. AAAAND I worked on the recoil. Turns out that a sequentially timed propulsion engraving-"

The King silenced her with a hand. "Normal words Veliry." He said simply, having grown accustomed to the mage's accelerating speech pattern over the years. "Slow down."

"Right. Sorry sir." She said. "I made it kick, as James calls it, a lot less. I also added a rudimentary aiming sight to it. It's still not AS accurate as the weapons from Earth. But it's better than the one I showed you last week."

At this point they'd reached the small cluster of soldiers standing in the archery range. They were all curiously strapping on the belts that they'd been supplied, though a few had gotten them backwards. Ira'Nyl, ever the professional, was already properly fitted and was helping one of the younger soldiers get his "holster" on the belt correctly.

"Alright everyone!" Veliry said, getting their attention. They turned to look at her and many of them jumped to salute the king. He quickly waved at them to go back to what they were doing. "I see a lot of you have your belts on. Some of you are struggling. Guardian, good job, and thank you for helping the others. If you're struggling, follow her lead, or look at the way I'm wearing mine." She watched as they continued putting the

belts on, going faster now that they knew that Ira'Nyl had gotten hers correct.

After a few minutes Veliry told them all to form a line with each of them positioned in front of the dummies usually used for archery practice.

"So." She began, pacing in front of them and between where they stood and the dummies. "I know you're all wondering what these belts and pouches are about, and I'm glad that none of you have peeked at their contents. I know that being involved in a demonstration that's been arranged by an Arch-Mage likely has some of you nervous. But don't worry. As long as you follow my instructions, and practice a bit of caution, we should all be returning home," She nodded at Ira'Nyl. "Or to our posts, after this with all of our bits attached and the way they were when we got here."

This drew a few light chuckles, including from the King.

"That said." She continued. "The things you are testing today ARE DANGEROUS."

She reached down and pulled open the triangular pouch. From it she drew a much smaller, and much more refined, version of the weapon the King had fired the week before. She held it up above her shoulder, aimed at the sky.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (195/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w9pl5f/wait_is_this_just_gate_194/)

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Side note: During James's last little joke, just imagine that he's channeling his inner 80's style BILL MURRAY. That's all.

Enjoy.

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"So..." James began as they rode through the fields surrounding the Council city. "Wolves huh?"

"Shut up." Vickers shot back, not looking at him from Tom's back.

"What? There's nothing wrong with it." James countered. "I mean.... I don't get it. But that's just me. There's plenty of furries out there. No judgment."

"I'm not a furry." Vickers replied as he kicked Tom into a trot.

James easily caught up with Steve. "If it makes you feel better; I made an almost identical, though significantly less extreme, version of the same mistake back when I first got here."

"It's true." Amina weighed in from where she sat behind him, before yawning. "He accidentally propositioned Kela without realizing she was a woman."

At that Vickers finally looked at him, one eyebrow raised.

"I did NOT proposition her!" James hissed. "I just didn't understand how packs worked yet. And didn't know what sleeping arrangements were going to be like."

"Was this before or AFTER you shoved your penis in her face?" Amina replied, making a point of looking down at his groin over his shoulder.

Vickers actually turned in his saddle to look at James.

"That is so NOT what happened." James replied, turning a bit red. "And it was AFTER... But that's beside the point." He said rapidly.

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"It's not-" He stammered. "It was a combination of being naked AFTER you guys had taken all my gear and clothes." He said turning back to point at Amina. "And me trying to fight her."

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"Oh. Don't even give me that FURRY BOY." He countered.

"I'm not a goddam furry!" He replied, kicking Tom to move faster.

"It's not uncommon." Amina said calmly as Steve caught up again. "Plenty of people end up in relationships with were-folk here." She shrugged a bit. "My brother loved Kela when they were still young." She admitted. "Still does a bit. But... well. Obviously that's a bit complicated." She said with a shrug as she looked back at the city fading into the distance behind them.

"I'm not in love with Atra." Vickers replied calmly.

James looked over with a raised eyebrow. "Oh it's Atra now eh?"

Vickers glared daggers at him. "It was just a fling." He said, jaw clenched. "Besides. She started it."

"Is that how SHE feels?" Amina asked. "Did you go talk to her?"

"Yes." He replied quickly. "Spoke to her a few hours after the ceremony."

"And?" Amina prodded.

"Like I said." He began. "Just a fling. Bit of fun with an stranger from out of town."

"Is that why you didn't show up at the inn until only half an hour before we headed out?" James asked with a wry grin on his face.

Vickers looked over to glare at him only to see Amina also grinning at him.

He simply looked back forward and kept riding.

James's head tilted for a moment. "C'mon bud." He said in a mocking attempt at a Boston accent. "Gimme da deets." Amina actually thought he sounded eerily similar to Vickers.

"Fuck off Choi." Vickers snapped back. Before James could respond Vickers let out a click from his mouth and pulled up on Tom's reins. The Griffin bolted forward a few bounds before spreading its wings and lifting into the air.

"Aw come on!" James yelled after him, still using the exaggerated accent. "I wanna know what it's like to walk on the wild side! What's it like to get a HOT... DOG here!"

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w9pjsb/wait_is_this_just_gate_194/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (194/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w8s17p/wait_is_this_just_gate_193/)

Writer's note: Back to being just a tiny bit sad. But we'll get back to fun stuff tomorrow.

Enjoy.

^(PS: Don't worry ya bunch of furries. We'll address the Elephant SEAL in the room before we move on. Just not this chapter.)

\~

James trudged through the last of the wet "Magic Cement" as he'd come to think of the grey goop that was a mixture of traditional earthen components, and less traditional magical components. In his hands he carried the, surprisingly heavy, dark blue sealing rune.

Below him the crowds teemed in the streets of the Council City. They were, almost to a person, all were-folk. There were exceptions. Dignitaries of importance, people who'd earned entry into the city through various means, and of course Amina. She'd been allowed to enter the area earlier than other people, her status as a princess and Kela's former pack leader granting her some small privilege. She stood now down where James couldn't see her. But when he'd left she had been resting her hand on Kela's paw.

Speaking of Kela, James was impressed by her pose. Most of the interred champions were in some kind of combative stance. Either posed to look like they were mid leap, or snarling, or some other kind of position to imply violence. There were a few that weren't, but only a few.

Kela was one of them. Rather than looking like she was about to attack, she was posed as if she was simply sitting. It was a position that would have been recognized by any dog owner anyways. Her face looked down at the people below with a mild tilt to the side. And it might have just been James, but he thought she looked like she was smiling, if only a little bit.

Now he was standing on the back of her neck, wearing a pair of foot and hand wraps specifically designed for the task, holding the final rune.

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"We welcome a new champion to our city." Said the old she-wolf from when the Council had been interviewing him and evaluating his status as a werewolf. "Captain Kela Swiftrunner of the Petravian Royal Guard. Mate of Jurl. Mother of Mela and Tilo. Pack mate of the Summoned Hero Captain Choi. Defeater of a Fire Elemental that destroyed nearly a third of the Petravian Capital." She paused to cough a few times, then sipped some water before continuing. "And the most recently manifested Champion of

the Goddess of the Moon, and also the first Champion to receive the goddess's blessing in the past five manifestations."

James watched as the people below began to place their hands on the shoulders of the people in front of them, each hand reaching for a different person. Even the members of the Outer Light positioned around the base of Kela's form reached out to either each other, or Kela's body.

"At this time her pack leader, Captain James Choi, will place the final rune in her cast, and one of our priests shall activate it. So that she may know peace in her eternal rest."

James held the rune up above her head, rotating it slowly so that the moonlight would catch it. Then he lowered it and pressed it into the cement until his arms were submerged up to his elbows. As he did the priest began chanting an incantation while releasing a bright white glow from his hands.

James felt the rune begin to warm in his hands, and felt the magical energy flow into it. As the priest said the word that James had been told to listen for, he released the rune and pulled his hands out of the cement.

He watched as the cement began to harden, drying out and forming a glossy smooth surface, starting with the position of the Rune.

He and the priest both lifted their wrapped feet up and stepped onto the hardened cement before pulling their back feet up to match as the cement's hardening magic spread past where they'd been standing.

Then something happened that James hadn't been warned of.

The entire crowd began to howl, almost as one.

The majority of the sound was werewolves howling in that tell tale sound that James had heard during his first nights in this world coming from Kela and Jurl. But there were also the cries of the other were-folk. The roars of the various felines, the cries of the rare bird based people, plus several other cries that James didn't recognize.

He knew he wouldn't hold a candle to any of them, but James tilted his head back and yelled at the top of his lungs, doing what he could to emulate a howl.

He let the few tears roll down his cheeks without stopping them.

Somehow he knew that this was going to be the last time he ever saw Kela. From here on out she wouldn't be Kela to anyone except him and the other people close to her. Amina, Jurl, Alixan, the pups. They would be the only one's who TRULY knew her name.

As the howl ended, the old She-Wolf spoke once again.

"And now our city is watched over... guarded... and, like those she knew in her mortal life, guided... by Kela... The Mother." She said as the people below listened. "May we all aspire to her heroism."

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Not as Kela the stern Captain, or Kela the sister, Kela the ACTUAL mother, or Kela the enemy and murderer turned friend.

But as Kela the Mother..... Kela the massive statue, looking over their city with a gentle, dog-like half smile.

It wasn't a bad way to know her. But it wasn't the real way.

"It is a good title." Said the priest, breaking James out of his thoughts. "Come. We should get these wraps off of our feet before they dry." She said as she turned and began climbing down Kela's back.

"Yeah." He said as he looked back down at the crowd, which didn't seem to be dissipating. "Yeah it is."

Occasional howls continued to emanate from below. Not the same, all encompassing howl. But it seemed to be some kind of tradition to keep them going for a while.

A few minutes later, after he got back to the ground and had removed the wraps and rinsed his feet, James made his way to where Amina had been.

He found her there, locked in the same position with tears on her cheeks. She was staring at the massive paw that her hand was resting on, and several of the crowd members still had their hands on her shoulders. One of them, an odd deer-like person released a strange, ululating cry just as James got there.

James walked over and placed his left hand on her waist, pulling her into his side. She kept her hand on the paw, but placed her other hand over his as he pulled her close. They leaned their heads against each other, not saying anything.

They knew that the next day they would be heading back to the capital, so they stood that way for a while as the crowd, very slowly, dissipated. Listening to the howls, and silently saying their final goodbyes to their friend.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/walx1l/wait_is_this_just_gate_195/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (194/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w8rzo0/wait_is_this_just_gate_193/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Back to being just a tiny bit sad. But we'll get back to fun stuff tomorrow.

Enjoy.

^(PS: Don't worry ya bunch of furries. We'll address the Elephant SEAL in the room before we move on. Just not this chapter.)

\~

James trudged through the last of the wet "Magic Cement" as he'd come to think of the grey goop that was a mixture of traditional earthen components, and less traditional magical components. In his hands he carried the, surprisingly heavy, dark blue sealing rune.

Below him the crowds teemed in the streets of the Council City. They were, almost to a person, all were-folk. There were exceptions. Dignitaries of importance, people who'd earned entry into the city through various means, and of course Amina. She'd been allowed to enter the area earlier than other people, her status as a princess and Kela's former pack leader granting her some small privilege. She stood now down where James couldn't see her. But when he'd left she had been resting her hand on Kela's paw.

Speaking of Kela, James was impressed by her pose. Most of the interred champions were in some kind of combative stance. Either posed to look like they were mid leap, or snarling, or some other kind of position to imply violence. There were a few that weren't, but only a few.

Kela was one of them. Rather than looking like she was about to attack, she was posed as if she was simply sitting. It was a position that would have been recognized by any dog owner anyways. Her face looked down at the people below with a mild tilt to the side. And it might have just been James, but he thought she looked like she was smiling, if only a little bit.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/walvg9/wait_is_this_just_gate_195/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (193/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w81rrt/wait_is_this_just_gate_192/)

Writer's note: >!Sorry to dissapoint. But there's plot reasons NOT to go that way.!<

This is fun though.

Enjoy.

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"This is not good." Trelen said as he paced back and forth in the room that Vickers had called James and Amina into.

Amina was sitting on a chair staring at Vickers with wide, concerned, eyes.

James was doubled over in his chair trying not to laugh.

"An unsanctioned turning is a great offense. Especially for a member of the Outer Light." Trelen continued.

"So I am gonna become a werewolf?" Vickers asked with a hint of genuine fear.

"You had sex with a werewolf didn't you?" Trelen asked, pointing his cane at Vickers for emphasis. "That's what you just implied. Correct?" He began pacing again. "Atrafar of all people." He grumbled to himself. "Thought she was better than that."

"Fuck." Vickers spat out. "I'm supposed to be the responsible one."

James just continued stifling laughter.

"We're going to need to get him into one of the chambers you have set aside for new transformations." Amina said to the old wolf. "You'll have to line the room in silver retainer wire. What with the full moon being only a week away."

"This is precisely why we don't turn people unless it's near the NEW moon." Trelen said, jabbing at Vickers again.

"I didn't exactly have my inhibitions." Vickers tried to defend himself. "And I'm really sore."

"Atrafar will have to be tried by the council." Trelen said sternly. "She shall be branded and have her teeth capped." He rubbed at his own mouth absently at the thought. "Then she shall be exiled. Never to enter any Council cities again."

Vickers blanched. He didn't know Atrafar terribly well, and he wasn't going to pretend that he loved the she wolf. But that seemed harsh to him.

"You'll have to be gelded." Amina said with a hollow voice.

"Indeed." Trelen agreed.

"Wha-" Vickers began.

"And we'll have to collar you and bind you to your superior here." Trelen continued, jabbing his cane at Choi's laughing form. This made Choi laugh even more. "At least until someone bloods you into their pack."

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Then Amina snickered a bit. Vickers looked at her in anger.

James cackled at his fiance's loss of composure. Vickers glared at him.

Then he saw Trelen's slowly spreading smile.

"Are.... are you fuckin' with me?" He asked, still angry.

"I think your new werewolf girlfriend beat us to that bud." James said between laughs. Amina joined his laughter and even Trelen chuckled a bit.

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"Well that's new." Amina commented. "Did you know he could do that?" She asked James as she wiped an eye of tears.

"Hehehehe... No." James answered. "Pretty cool though. Pun INTENDED."

"How are you joking right now?" Vickers asked through clenched teeth. Then he looked back at Trelen. "Am I gonna be a damn wolf or not?" He asked.

Trelen chuckled a bit more. "You are most decidedly.... not." Trelen replied.

Vickers sagged back onto his seat at the answer. "Oh thank fuck." He sighed.

"Relax Mister Vickers." Trelen continued. "Lycanthropy is not sexually transmitted." He tilted his head a bit, causing his old leathery ears to flop a little. "If it was, there would be SIGNIFICANTLY more of us." He waved his cane a bit. "And believe me when I say that even a DRUNK member of the Outer Light can maintain enough self control not to turn a person by accident. Even if things do get a bit steamy."

"Are you sure?" Vickers asked, still clearly concerned. "I mean. We got pretty rough."

Trelen sighed. "Did you get bitten?" He asked.

"No."

"Did you have any significant open wounds that got a large amount of Atrafar's saliva, blood, or um.... other fluids into it?" Trelen continued.

"Uh... No?" Vickers said hesitantly before beginning to inspect his arms and legs. "Least I don't think so. But we did make out quite a bit."

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Vickers shook his head in mild disgust at the idea of swallowing CUPS of saliva, or.... other fluids as the old wolf had said. "NO." He said.

"Are your bones currently aching as if they're on fire?" Trelen asked with a hint of exasperation. "Can you smell the raw meat in the kitchen downstairs? The transformation is fairly rapid. Assuming you two had your... fling... last night you'd have already turned by now." He said as he sat down on the bench near the door."

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Trelen didn't answer. He simply stared at the large man with his one good eye.

"Do I not seem like an expert on my own kind?" He said after a moment.

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"Dude..." Choi said from where he was sitting. "You're a furry."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w9pl5f/wait_is_this_just_gate_194/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (193/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w81qm4/wait_is_this_just_gate_192/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (192/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w5mkrs/wait_is_this_just_gate_191/)

Writer's note: Uuuuuuuh... Stuff happens?

Enjoy.

PS: No. I will not elaborate on the last section.

\~

James returned on the second day of their stay with a bundle that was a lot smaller than he'd expected. He was covered in dark grey clay, a remnant of the work he'd been doing mixing the slurry that was being used to coat Kela and turn her into a statue. He'd asked Trelen if he could take part in the construction and the old wolf had said that he could, but it would simply be as a menial laborer. James had had no issue with that. He'd felt obligated to help.

The mixture itself reminded James of concrete, but there were a few ingredients that were clearly part of the magical properties the stone would have once the interment was completed. For starters there was powdered Elemental Obsidian in the mixture, as well as something one of the workers had called Stang marrow. James didn't know what a Stang was, but their marrow had the consistency of spoiled milk, and smelled of old fish. There were a few other things mixed in as well, but the workers didn't know what it was. Something proprietary James assumed.

As he walked back into his and Amina's room at the inn he placed the bundle on the table before heading to the baths down the hall.

"What's that?" Amina asked as she set her book down.

"Kela's armor and gauntlets." James replied as he peeled his almost solidified shirt off. "One of the temple clerics sought me out to give it to me. Apparently they managed to get it off of her. Lot smaller than I expected. You know... considering."

Amina opened the bag and pulled out one of the gauntlets inspecting it intently. "They only sized up because she transformed while wearing them." She said. "Some relics do that. Didn't think the dispersion armor would though." She added as she picked up the chest plate. Then she looked at the straps which had been cut.

"They said they had to remove that one with some neutralizing gear." James said as he saw her inspection.

"It would have dissipated the energy of their efforts otherwise." She said absently. "The mages should be able to repair it."

"Right." James said. "I'm gonna go clean up now. Say, where's Vickers? Haven't seen him in a few days."

"He's been in and out." She replied. "He and Atrafar have been hanging out more. Probably out starting a brawl somewhere."

"Hope not." James said curiously. "He's kinda supposed to be putting a good foot forward." Then he shrugged. "Whatever. Guy's a SEAL he can do whatever. Be right back." And with that he finally left for the relaxation of a good bath.

Tomorrow was the big day.

He'd give Amina the news when he got back to the room. She'd be happy, even if they both knew that it would likely reopen some still fresh wounds.

\--------------------------

"So.... those tests went poorly." Sticky said as they all sat around on the chairs set up in the comms tent. "Two out of three dead. One in a coma." He said before popping a piece of jerky in his mouth. "Real not good."

"Bit of an understatement Sticky." MSG Nguyen said as he plugged his tablet into the communication hub to sync its data. "Glad you're so broken up over it."

"What?" Sticky said with a mouthful of jerky. "The two that died were fuckin' monsters. And while coma guy might not have been AS BAD, he was still a fuckin' dirtbag."

"And they've officially finished their sentences." The doctor weighed in. "They're still people. Have a bit of decency. Besides, they gave good data that might be our ticket home some day."

Sticky grumbled a bit. "Still not gonna cry over a rapist and a murderer." He said under his breath.

"Sticky if you wanna keep being a little Red-Shoe over it than I'll have you on dust duty for the next week." Nguyen said as he input his password to let the other side know that they were ready. "Doc's right. You aint gotta like the guys. I sure don't. But don't be an ass."

Sticky grumbled just a bit more. "Hooah Sarge." He said begrudgingly. "Shuttin' up."

"Atta boy." Nguyen replied just as the screen lit up.

A few moments of the boot process and the screen showed a split display. On one side was the Secretary, at the tertiary door site, and on the other was the General.

"Afternoon everybody." The Secretary began as a bit of lag caused his image to stutter a bit. The signal had never completely cleared up after the Elemental attack in the capital. but it was better. "So.. good news and bad." He continued.

"Yeah, we heard about the test." The General weighed in. "Shame it didn't work out."

"Yeah." Grant said, a little peeved about the General's interruption. "But, good news is that Subject one. A.... former... Staff Sergeant Twinning... is conscious again. He is still being evaluated, and is

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"But as you know." The Secretary continued. "The other two subjects did perish." He said with a bit of mock sadness. "Not exactly upstanding citizens, but their death sentences have officially been carried out. And the damage to their bodies has given us some valuable insight both into what happens during the return trip, and how effective the suits were. So... some value gained at least."

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"Very well." The General replied. "Ambassador Werner is making some good ground on getting our governments on the same page. Captain Choi and Chief Vickers are currently on a trip, as you know, to meet with a local.... theocracy... I believe it is. And to Deal with some kind of burial rites for the recently deceased Captain Swiftrunner. He is expected to be back in roughly a month, month and a half."

"Any issues with our uh... blight issue?"

Nguyen perked up at that. During their journey here they'd all heard rumors of the vanishing blight. They were all curious about the issue, despite being nowhere near where the blights had manifested.

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"Everyone keep up the good work. Grant out." The Secretary said before reaching forward and shutting off his connection.

"Keep up the good work Nguyen." General Krick said. "Anything goes wrong, let me know." And then the General signed off too.

"Well that was a whole lotta nothing." Nguyen heard from behind him.

Nguyen sighed. "You're not wrong Sticky." He turned around. "Alright everyone. You heard the Secretary." He waved his hands a bit. "Go do some good work."

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He held his hand out and Veliry handed him the weapon hesitantly.

It was simply. A brass-wood handle with an iron tube on top. Some kind of feed mechanism that looked to be manually operated. A hopper for the projectiles, and a hole in the bottom that opened when it was pulled back, small enough that unspent rounds wouldn't fit, big enough that spent ones would.

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He rocked back a bit and then switched the weapon to his other hand so he could shake the firing hand for a moment. The recoil hurt. He looked back up and saw that his aim had gone wide by almost a foot.

"And make them better." He added.

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He hobbled a little bit.

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Then they'd gotten into the fighting ring that was set up in the tavern, which had been having bare knuckle brawls the entire night.

If that had been all that had happened, Vickers still would have been sore.

But then as the night had worn on Atrafar had taken him up to a room for the night. Vickers had thought that the wolf had just been dropping him off so they could both crash out until the morning. They were both drunk, and Vickers was more than a little bruised from one of the Orcs he'd been pitted against.

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That had been a surprise.

Then he'd also learned that Atrafar had... apparently... seen all his jokes and fighting skills as quite impressive, and somewhat flirtatious.

Things had become a, admittedly consenting, blur of fur, sweat, and claws after that.

It hadn't been.... unpleasant. He admitted to himself. But it had been unexpected.

And it also hadn't been easy on his already battered body.

"This is gonna be fuckin hard to explain." He thought as he slowly walked back to the Inn that he and the others had gotten their rooms at for the stay.

He leaned against a wall to recover for a moment to let his left calf stop cramping for a bit. Some light reflected off of a window nearby and he saw the reflection of the moon's last few minutes of light in it.

He looked up and saw the moon. Then he looked around at all the different were-people that this place was packed with. He was actually one of the few NON were-people.

"Oh I really hope that aint...fuckin... transmittable." He said with a groan as he pushed off of the wall and started limping again.

Yep. Hard to explain. He thought. *But hey. Whether it is or aint. It wasn't exactly.... bad.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w8s17p/wait_is_this_just_gate_193/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (192/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w5mjew/wait_is_this_just_gate_191/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Uuuuuuuh... Stuff happens?

Enjoy.

PS: No. I will not elaborate on the last section.

PPS: I totally missed my chance to say that this week started with... A bang.

\~

James returned on the second day of their stay with a bundle that was a lot smaller than he'd expected. He was covered in dark grey clay, a

remnant of the work he'd been doing mixing the slurry that was being used to coat Kela and turn her into a statue. He'd asked Trelen if he could take part in the construction and the old wolf had said that he could, but it would simply be as a menial laborer. James had had no issue with that. He'd felt obligated to help.

The mixture itself reminded James of concrete, but there were a few ingredients that were clearly part of the magical properties the stone would have once the interment was completed. For starters there was powdered Elemental Obsidian in the mixture, as well as something one of the workers had called Stang marrow. James didn't know what a Stang was, but their marrow had the consistency of spoiled milk, and smelled of old fish. There were a few other things mixed in as well, but the workers didn't know what it was. Something proprietary James assumed.

As he walked back into his and Amina's room at the inn he placed the bundle on the table before heading to the baths down the hall.

"What's that?" Amina asked as she set her book down.

"Kela's armor and gauntlets." James replied as he peeled his almost solidified shirt off. "One of the temple clerics sought me out to give it to me. Apparently they managed to get it off of her. Lot smaller than I expected. You know... considering."

Amina opened the bag and pulled out one of the gauntlets inspecting it intently. "They only sized up because she transformed while wearing them." She said. "Some relics do that. Didn't think the dispersion armor would though." She added as she picked up the chest plate. Then she looked at the straps which had been cut.

"They said they had to remove that one with some neutralizing gear." James said as he saw her inspection.

"It would have dissipated the energy of their efforts otherwise." She said absently. "The mages should be able to repair it."

"Right." James said. "I'm gonna go clean up now. Say, where's Vickers? Haven't seen him in a few days."

"He's been in and out." She replied. "He and Atrafar have been hanging out more. Probably out starting a brawl somewhere."

"Hope not." James said curiously. "He's kinda supposed to be putting a good foot forward." Then he shrugged. "Whatever. Guy's a SEAL he can do whatever. Be right back." And with that he finally left for the relaxation of a good bath.

Tomorrow was the big day.

He'd give Amina the news when he got back to the room. She'd be happy, even if they both knew that it would likely reopen some still fresh wounds.

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"So.... those tests went poorly." Sticky said as they all sat around on the chairs set up in the comms tent. "Two out of three dead. One in a coma." He said before popping a piece of jerky in his mouth. "Real not good."

"Bit of an understatement Sticky." MSG Nguyen said as he plugged his tablet into the communication hub to sync its data. "Glad you're so broken up over it."

"What?" Sticky said with a mouthful of jerky. "The two that died were fuckin' monsters. And while coma guy might not have been AS BAD, he was still a fuckin' dirtbag."

"And they've officially finished their sentences." The doctor weighed in. "They're still people. Have a bit of decency. Besides, they gave good data that might be our ticket home some day."

Sticky grumbled a bit. ^("Still not gonna cry over a rapist and a murderer.") He said under his breath.

"Sticky if you wanna keep being a little Red-Shoe over it than I'll have you on dust duty for the next week." Nguyen said as he input his password to let the other side know that they were ready. "Doc's right. You aint gotta like the guys. I sure don't. But don't be an ass."

Sticky grumbled just a bit more. "Hooah Sarge." He said begrudgingly. "Shuttin' up."

"Atta boy." Nguyen replied just as the screen lit up.

A few moments of the boot process and the screen showed a split display. On one side was the Secretary, at the tertiary door site, and on the other was the General.

"Afternoon everybody." The Secretary began as a bit of lag caused his image to stutter a bit. The signal had never completely cleared up after the Elemental attack in the capital. but it was better. "So.. good news and bad." He continued.

"Yeah, we heard about the test." The General weighed in. "Shame it didn't work out."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (191/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w4twef/wait_is_this_just_gate_190/)

Dusty old councils of dusty old people are meant to be vague and weird. It's like... a rule.

Enjoy.

\~

"So uhh.... did I have to be..... mostly..... naked?" James asked curiously as he stood in the dirt pit before the Lunar council. He was still wearing his boxer briefs. But that was all.

"It is customary." Said a were-boar that looked even older than Trelen had. James hadn't gotten any of their names.

The "room" was surrounded on all sides by members of the Outer Light. They all wore the same white and green enamel coated armor. And they all had the same silver tipped gauntlets. They stood as still as statues.

The room itself actually looked like something out of a movie about ancient Rome or Greece or something. It looked like it was constructed out of the same kind of grey stone that the Champions had been interred in, and James felt a low level of magical energy that seemed to emanate from it all. But other than that it was an open forum with columns

holding up the roof. However the roof itself was dominated by a massive opening that seemed to shift to follow the moon. He'd noticed it moving as his wait for the council members had dragged on.

But now they were all here.

The first thing they'd done once they'd arrived wasn't to introduce themselves, it was for each of them to take turns walking around James and wordlessly, awkwardly, giving him a once over. They all lingered on the left hand, and James had actually expected some of them to touch it, poking and prodding. But none of them had. To his surprise a handful of them had scoffed at the scar and tattoo on the back of his leg marking him as a member of Clan Drakrid.

Once the.... inspection... had completed, the council had gathered on one side of the room, still not addressing James directly, and had conferred with each other for nearly an hour.

Now they were all standing equidistant from each other around the room, and the old were-boar had been the first to actually speak to him since Trelen had guided him into the room.

"Captain James Choi." The old board said. "Of the world known as Earth."

"That's me." James replied hesitantly.

"Pack leader to one.... Kela Swiftrunner." A different council member said. This one was another wolf.

"Before she died." He answered. "Yes."

"At your hands." The same wolf said.

James didn't back down from the implied judgment.

"Yes." He said, head still held high.

"Why?" Another member behind him asked. He turned to look at them, but the council members all stayed stock still. So he just turned back.

"Because she was in pain. And scared." He said to the council members in front of him. "And because I'd promised to kill her nearly a year before."

"And you call yourself her pack leader?" Another voice asked.

"I do." He replied. "I killed her in combat three times over in a single fight. And if you're wondering why I had sworn to do it again.... It's because she killed my friend.... And being the young dumb guy that I.... still am honestly. I basically swore vengeance."

The council members murmured among themselves for a moment.

"It was a quick death?" One of them asked.

James nodded. "As quick as I could make it. You've seen her body by now. I imagine you already know how I did it. I didn't want it to be painful for her."

"Even though you'd... sworn vengeance?"

James clenched his jaw as he glanced toward the voice. "DESPITE that fact." He said simply. "She had... become my friend.... my best friend."

James saw an older werecat, similar to the lynx person he'd travelled here with, nod subtly at the response.

"Killing her caused the Goddess of the Moon to communicate directly with you?" The boar asked. "To hold you in judgment?"

James nodded. "Yes."

"And afterword she regenerated your left hand. And replaced it with one that is akin to that of a werewolf."

James held the hand up and shook it. "Either that or all my grandfather's dirty jokes finally came true." He joked.

None of them laughed.

"What did she say to you? And did she call it a gift or a curse?" Another asked.

"She mostly complimented me." He admitted. "She also kind of sexually harassed me. As for the hand? Well she kind of implied that it was a bit of both." The council members murmured again at the mention of the sexual harassment.

"A gift and a curse?" The boar asked. "Which would you say it is?"

James actually had to think of that one. He looked down at the furred, clawed, oversized hand.

"I haven't quite figured that part out yet." He admitted. "It's strong as hell. Can't deny that. And it does look pretty sweet. But ummm... well. It's got a bit of baggage tied to it."

The lynx person nodded once more, and James couldn't help but feel like that member was at least partially on his side.

"Have you bitten anyone since obtaining your new hand?" The boar asked. "Do you know if you can turn people?"

"Ummmm...." James began. He had definitely bitten one person that he could think of. But he didn't think that counted. "I don't think those bites are the kind you're thinking of. I definitely didn't break skin." He blushed as he thought of the situation they'd occurred in, and became VERY aware of his semi-nudity again. He shifted his hands to cover his

crotch a bit better. But he wasn't about to air our his and Amina's dirty laundry.

The boar shook their head slightly at the implication.

An older wolf that hadn't spoken yet stood up suddenly, and the other council members looked to her. She looked around at the other members of the council and seemed to be looking for some kind of signal. But if they were giving any, James couldn't tell what they were.

"Captain Choi." The old wolf said. "The Lunar Council has determined that while you are NOT a werewolf or were-creature, despite your hand." She looked around at the other members again. "However... You have been directly addressed by our goddess and she has looked upon you favorably." She paused as she let out a ragged cough before speaking again. "Which puts you in rare company. In fact even our most wise and ancient Lunar Priests have not had direct contact with her in well over three centuries. And none of them are Champion slayers or pack breakers."

James suddenly felt quite vulnerable. He looked at the guards posted around the room and became worried that maybe they were actually the firing squad, and he was about to be handed a cigarette.

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"That was it." Trelen said as he walked up behind James. James was surprised at how quietly the old wolf had approached, even with his cane. "Come. We have a place for you, if you want it. Or I can take you to the inn that your friends are at." He began walking away before James had even had the chance to grab his bundle of clothes. "Tomorrow they shall begin the interment. It will likely take several days before it is ready enough for your part."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w81rrt/wait_is_this_just_gate_192/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (191/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w4tuy9/wait_is_this_just_gate_190/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Dusty old councils of dusty old people are meant to be vague and weird. It's like... a rule.

Enjoy.

EDIT: Weekly reminder that r/GATEhouse *exists*

\~

"So uhh.... did I have to be..... mostly..... naked?" James asked curiously as he stood in the dirt pit before the Lunar council. He was still wearing his boxer briefs. But that was all.

"It is customary." Said a were-boar that looked even older than Trelen had. James hadn't gotten any of their names.

The "room" was surrounded on all sides by members of the Outer Light. They all wore the same white and green enamel coated armor. And they all had the same silver tipped gauntlets. They stood as still as statues.

The room itself actually looked like something out of a movie about ancient Rome or Greece or something. It looked like it was constructed out of the same kind of grey stone that the Champions had been interred in, and James felt a low level of magical energy that seemed to emanate from it all. But other than that it was an open forum with columns holding up the roof. However the roof itself was dominated by a massive opening that seemed to shift to follow the moon. He'd noticed it moving as his wait for the council members had dragged on.

But now they were all here.

The first thing they'd done once they'd arrived wasn't to introduce themselves, it was for each of them to take turns walking around James and wordlessly, awkwardly, giving him a once over. They all lingered on the left hand, and James had actually expected some of them to touch it, poking and prodding. But none of them had. To his surprise a handful of them had scoffed at the scar and tattoo on the back of his leg marking him as a member of Clan Drakrid.

Once the.... inspection... had completed, the council had gathered on one side of the room, still not addressing James directly, and had conferred with each other for nearly an hour.

Now they were all standing equidistant from each other around the room, and the old were-boar had been the first to actually speak to him since Trelen had guided him into the room.

"Captain James Choi." The old boar said. "Of the world known as Earth."

"That's me." James replied hesitantly.

"Pack leader to one.... Kela Swiftrunner." A different council member said. This one was another wolf.

"Before she died." He answered. "Yes."

"At your hands." The same wolf said.

James didn't back down from the implied judgment.

"Yes." He said, head still held high.

"Why?" Another member behind him asked. He turned to look at them, but the council members all stayed stock still. So he just turned back.

"Because she was in pain. And scared." He said to the council members in front of him. "And because I'd promised to kill her nearly a year before."

"And you call yourself her pack leader?" Another voice asked.

"I do." He replied. "I killed her in combat three times over in a single fight. And if you're wondering why I had sworn to do it again.... It's because she killed my friend.... And being the young dumb guy that I.... still am honestly. I basically swore vengeance."

The council members murmured among themselves for a moment.

"It was a quick death?" One of them asked.

James nodded. "As quick as I could make it. You've seen her body by now. I imagine you already know how I did it. I didn't want it to be painful for her."

"Even though you'd... sworn vengeance?"

James clenched his jaw as he glanced toward the voice. "DESPITE that fact." He said simply. "She had... become my friend.... my best friend."

James saw an older werecat, similar to the lynx person he'd travelled here with, nod subtly at the response.

"Killing her caused the Goddess of the Moon to communicate directly with you?" The boar asked. "To hold you in judgment?"

James nodded. "Yes."

"And afterword she regenerated your left hand. And replaced it with one that is akin to that of a werewolf."

James held the hand up and shook it. "Either that or all my grandfather's dirty jokes finally came true." He joked.

None of them laughed.

"What did she say to you? And did she call it a gift or a curse?" Another asked.

"She mostly complimented me." He admitted. "She also kind of sexually harassed me. As for the hand? Well she kind of implied that it was a bit of both." The council members murmured again at the mention of the sexual harassment.

"A gift and a curse?" The boar asked. "Which would you say it is?"

James actually had to think of that one. He looked down at the furred, clawed, oversized hand.

"I haven't quite figured that part out yet." He admitted. "It's strong as hell. Can't deny that. And it does look pretty sweet. But ummm... well. It's got a bit of baggage tied to it."

The lynx person nodded once more, and James couldn't help but feel like that member was at least partially on his side.

"Have you bitten anyone since obtaining your new hand?" The boar asked. "Do you know if you can turn people?"

"Ummmm...." James began. He had definitely bitten one person that he could think of. But he didn't think that counted. "I don't think those bites are the kind you're thinking of. I definitely didn't break skin." He blushed as he thought of the situation they'd occurred in, and became VERY aware of his semi-nudity again. He shifted his hands to cover his crotch a bit better. But he wasn't about to air our his and Amina's dirty laundry.

The boar shook their head slightly at the implication.

An older wolf that hadn't spoken yet stood up suddenly, and the other council members looked to her. She looked around at the other members of the council and seemed to be looking for some kind of signal. But if they were giving any, James couldn't tell what they were.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (190/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w40n84/wait_is_this_just_gate_189/)

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Vickers of all people had actually become quite close to a light grey furred werewolf named Atrafar. The two had bonded once the wolf had seen Vickers training his boxing skills with a tree that he'd wrapped a blanket around during some of their down time. It turned out that Atrafar was also a boxer, or at least the local equivalent of one, and the two had taken to sparring. James had been surprised to find that Atrafar actually had a startlingly similar accent to Vickers as well, though it sounded like it had a hint of some kind of Scandinavian too. Like a Bostonian that had lived a long time in Minnesota or something.

But now the small party, nine in total, had finally pulled up over the last hill that had kept them from seeing the Wolf Hold.

The first thing James noticed. That any of them noticed really, since it was impossible not to, was the massive statues that seemed to be scattered through the city.

The first one he saw, and the largest, was a massive wolf that seemed to be standing over the main gates of the city walls. It was positioned in a way that reminded James of countless pictures he'd seen in books and on television back home. Like a wolf with its head low as it looked at the camera. Or in this case at the road leading to the gate.

Only it was several hundred feet tall and made of some kind of light grey stone. Curiosly he didn't see any signs of any birds or anything on it. The stone seemed almost pristine. As if it had been carved only yesterday.

And suddenly he had an idea of what everyone had meant when they'd mentioned Kela's interment.

"Hey Trelen?" He asked as he pulled Steve up next to the old wolf's carriage.

"Yes?" The old wolf responded.

"Is that...." He began as he nodded toward the imposing statue. "A champion?"

Trelen nodded slowly as he looked forward. "It is." he admitted. "That is Trenaea the Guardian. She was the first of our people to ever become a champion of the goddess. Thousands of years ago."

"She's huge." James said in mild awe. "Are... all of them champions?"

Trelen nodded again.

"Their bodies don't decay." Trelen said sadly. "And they continue to emanate magical energy for decades, or even centuries, after their deaths." He looked out the opposite window at a different champion. "Plus they are holy creatures. Our goddess's chosen warriors. They must be given peace."

James felt Amina pressing her face into his back. He reached back and patted her head.

"They're gonna do that to Kela." He said grimly.

Trelen simply nodded again.

"And I'm supposed to take part in that." He said.

"Yes." Trelen confirmed. "It is the pack leader's right to place the final seal in place before the interment is complete. To prevent them from ever being affected by any nefarious magics." He looked over at James and Amina. "Now come. We can drop of your comrades in the periphery. We must report to the council."

"We're not coming with?" Amina asked. James heard the sadness in her voice.

"Humans are not allowed in the Council City." Trelen replied. "Non were-people are only allowed entry if they are specifically requested by the council. And only Captain Choi has been summoned."

And with that the group continued riding forward, closer to the massive statue's feet. James did what he could not to look into the massive wolf's eyes as they approached. But it seemed almost to follow him as they moved. Trelen confirmed that it was a common belief that the interred champions watched over the city even after their death.

Suddenly James felt much worse about what he was going to be taking part in.

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When Sherk made landfall in the town he first went to the tavern. Sure enough he saw Dent and Pilck there sharing tales with the locals as they tended to do.

He checked in with them and confirmed that the party was in fact ready to begin this particular excursion and were simply doing final checks and waiting for him. Sherk tossed a coin on the table and bought their next round, then went over to the bar.

Ioan was tending the drinks tonight, as he had been since his mother had passed nearly five years earlier. He was busy talking to a few of the patrons when Sherk called him over.

"Hey Sherk." The young half orc said as he came over. "Ale?"

"Aye that'd do lad." Sherk replied as he placed a silver coin down on the bar top. Ioan turned to grab a pint glass and begin filling it. "Say Ioan?" Sherk wondered.

"Ya?"

"You remember a few months back... round the beginning of winter it'd be.... when the Royal Army was looking for some odd folks that they said might've been a bit funny. They were mostly werewolves and other sniffy folks, these guards."

"Uhhh. Yeah kinda." The bartender replied as he placed the full mug down in front of Sherk. "That was a while back. But they did ask around a bit. Damned lazy sots were posted up here for about three days before they moved on."

"Were they now?" Sherk wondered. "They leave a way to get in touch with em?"

"They left directions with the town boss, Branten." Ioan answered. "Think it was mainly to say report to the local garrison though."

"Over in Gridas?" Sherk asked.

"Yeah." Ioan replied. "Why? Think you found some?"

Sherk thought for a moment as he took a long pull from the ale.

"Hope not." He said as he wiped the foam from his mustache. "But did meet some curious folk."

"Hefty reward if you did find em." Ioan said as he placed another beer down. "Toss a coin my way if you get it."

Sherk raised the mug in mock salute as he walked back to the two drunk brothers. "Aye. I'll keep ya in mind lad." He said as he walked away.

Gridas is only two days flight away. Sherk thought as he joined Dent and Pilck. "AYE AND YOU GOT THAT DAMN THINGS TUSK STUCK IN YOUR CALF FOR THE TROUBLE!" He bellowed, interrupting Dent's story, drawing laughter from the small crowd around them.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w5mkrs/wait_is_this_just_gate_191/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (190/?)

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Vickers of all people had actually become quite close to a light grey furred werewolf named Atrafar. The two had bonded once the wolf had seen Vickers training his boxing skills with a tree that he'd wrapped a blanket around during some of their down time. It turned out that Atrafar was also a boxer, or at least the local equivalent of one, and the two had taken to sparring. James had been surprised to find that Atrafar actually had a startlingly similar accent to Vickers as well, though it sounded like it had a hint of some kind of Scandinavian too. Like a Bostonian that had lived a long time in Minnesota or something.

But now the small party, nine in total, had finally pulled up over the last hill that had kept them from seeing the Wolf Hold.

The first thing James noticed. That any of them noticed really, since it was impossible not to, was the massive statues that seemed to be scattered through the city.

The first one he saw, and the largest, was a massive wolf that seemed to be standing over the main gates of the city walls. It was positioned in a way that reminded James of countless pictures he'd seen in books and on television back home. Like a wolf with its head low as it looked at the camera. Or in this case at the road leading to the gate.

Only it was several hundred feet tall and made of some kind of light grey stone. Curiosly he didn't see any signs of any birds or anything on it. The stone seemed almost pristine. As if it had been carved only yesterday.

And suddenly he had an idea of what everyone had meant when they'd mentioned Kela's interment.

"Hey Trelen?" He asked as he pulled Steve up next to the old wolf's carriage.

"Yes?" The old wolf responded.

"Is that...." He began as he nodded toward the imposing statue. "A champion?"

Trelen nodded slowly as he looked forward. "It is." he admitted. "That is Trenaea the Guardian. She was the first of our people to ever become a champion of the goddess. Thousands of years ago."

"She's huge." James said in mild awe. "Are... all of them champions?"

Trelen nodded again.

"Their bodies don't decay." Trelen said sadly. "And they continue to emanate magical energy for decades, or even centuries, after their deaths." He looked out the opposite window at a different champion. "Plus they are holy creatures. Our goddess's chosen warriors. They must be given peace."

James felt Amina pressing her face into his back. He reached back and patted her head.

"They're gonna do that to Kela." He said grimly.

Trelen simply nodded again.

"And I'm supposed to take part in that." He said.

"Yes." Trelen confirmed. "It is the pack leader's right to place the final seal in place before the interment is complete. To prevent them from ever being affected by any nefarious magics." He looked over at James and Amina. "Now come. We can drop of your comrades in the periphery. We must report to the council."

"We're not coming with?" Amina asked. James heard the sadness in her voice.

"Humans are not allowed in the Council City." Trelen replied. "Non were-people are only allowed entry if they are specifically requested by the council. And only Captain Choi has been summoned."

And with that the group continued riding forward, closer to the massive statue's feet. James did what he could not to look into the massive wolf's eyes as they approached. But it seemed almost to follow him as they moved. Trelen confirmed that it was a common belief that the interred champions watched over the city even after their death.

Suddenly James felt much worse about what he was going to be taking part in.

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When Sherk made landfall in the town he first went to the tavern. Sure enough he saw Dent and Pilck there sharing tales with the locals as they tended to do.

He checked in with them and confirmed that the party was in fact ready to begin this particular excursion and were simply doing final checks and waiting for him. Sherk tossed a coin on the table and bought their next round, then went over to the bar.

Ioan was tending the drinks tonight, as he had been since his mother had passed nearly five years earlier. He was busy talking to a few of the patrons when Sherk called him over.

"Hey Sherk." The young half orc said as he came over. "Ale?"

"Aye that'd do lad." Sherk replied as he placed a silver coin down on the bar top. Ioan turned to grab a pint glass and begin filling it. "Say Ioan?" Sherk wondered.

"Ya?"

"You remember a few months back... round the beginning of winter it'd be.... when the Royal Army was looking for some odd folks that they said might've been a bit funny. They were mostly werewolves and other sniffy folks, these guards."

"Uhhh. Yeah kinda." The bartender replied as he placed the full mug down in front of Sherk. "That was a while back. But they did ask around a bit. Damned lazy sots were posted up here for about three days before they moved on."

"Were they now?" Sherk wondered. "They leave a way to get in touch with em?"

"They left directions with the town boss, Branten." Ioan answered. "Think it was mainly to say report to the local garrison though."

"Over in Gridas?" Sherk asked.

"Yeah." Ioan replied. "Why? Think you found some?"

Sherk thought for a moment as he took a long pull from the ale.

"Hope not." He said as he wiped the foam from his mustache. "But did meet some curious folk."

"Hefty reward if you did find em." Ioan said as he placed another beer down. "Toss a coin my way if you get it."

Sherk raised the mug in mock salute as he walked back to the two drunk brothers. "Aye. I'll keep ya in mind lad." He said as he walked away.

Gridas is only two days flight away. Sherk thought as he joined Dent and Pilck. "AYE AND YOU GOT THAT DAMN THINGS TUSK STUCK IN YOUR CALF FOR THE TROUBLE!" He bellowed, interrupting Dent's story, drawing laughter from the small crowd around them.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w5mjew/wait_is_this_just_gate_191/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (189/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w338ug/wait_is_this_just_gate_188/)

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And things are happening.

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Enjoy.

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"So you guys literally meant like.... right now?" James asked sarcastically as he and Amina bobbed up and down on Steve's back.

"Indeed." The old wolf Trelen answered from the window of the carriage that was rolling to his left. "The council is not a fan of waiting when it summons people."

"Still." James continued. "Coulda maybe.... I don't know... given us a day or two extra to prep." He looked at the creatures pulling Trelen's carriage. "Also. Seriously.... What the fuck are those things?"

The creatures in question looked like something out of James's worst nightmares. He could imagine them being in a horror movie.... maybe one

made by John Carpenter. They were.... vaguely... equine in shape. But that was the only part of it he could quantify. The rest was fangs, fur, and oddly placed claw-like protrusions.

"Werebeasts." Trelen said simply.

"That causes more questions than it answers." James said to himself. "Also. Is that guy a cat?"

"The affliction encompasses more than just wolves dear." Amina said from his left shoulder. "Wolves are just the most common."

"THAT JUST RAISES FURTHER QUESTIONS!" James exclaimed loudly.

"That is confusing." Vickers added from where he was riding Tom behind them.

"There are lots of different were-people guys." Amina chimed in. "The only reason wolves are so common is because they have the highest bite transmission rate amongst their youths."

"A sad truth." Trelen agreed. "But that's why they're put in their own schools and daycare until they're old enough to control themselves."

That.... did make sense to James. He supposed. But he still had questions.

"So?" He began. "Am I in trouble or something? Like what IS this trip about?"

"I've told you all I really can." Trelen replied. "But I doubt it."

James waited. But after a few moments it became clear that the old wolf wasn't going to say any more.

"This is gonna be a long few weeks isn't it?" He asked Amina.

"Most likely." She said back as she leaned her head on his shoulder.

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"OKAY!" Anderson said with a grunt. "THIS... IS... FUCKING AWESOME!"

And it was. Riding on the back of the dragon was in fact THE SINGLE COOLEST THING Anderson could remember doing in his entire life. And he'd deployed twice in his career AND had spent the past two thirds of a year on a clandestine mission in a fantasy world IN A DIFFERENT UNIVERSE.

But none of that held a candle to soaring through the air on the back of a dragon. Even if he was riding bitch behind a fairly smelly dwarf named Sherk.

"Aye! So you tell me every time we fly!" Sherk yelled back at him.

"THAT'S CAUSE IT KEEPS BEING TRUE!" Anderson replied.

Sherk just shook his head as the dragon began its descent back to the camp.

It had been nearly a week since the MSG had made a deal with the dwarven Clan Drakrid member to ferry Anderson to the village that Reeves, Chief Isaacs, and the Doctor had been left at while Reeves had been recovering from a nasty case of pneumonia.

He'd been pleasantly surprised when they'd gotten news that the trio had left the village only a week earlier. Reeves had apparently recovered quite well and the three of them had stocked up and gone to join the rest of the camp.

Anderson had gotten Sherk to agree to follow the trail until they'd managed to find the small party walking toward the mountain trail that he'd traversed only a few months before. A quick check in to make sure everything was okay and he and Sherk had taken off for the desert valley again.

Plus it had been a good chance to show off that he was a damn dragon rider now, even if only barely.

Sherk, it turned out was watching the desert because his clan of dwarves used it as a base for incursions into something called "The Deep Dark", which sounded to him like this world's Underdark. Apparently the Dunebasher clan specialized in digging their way through the desert sands. But as a downside to using the desert to access the Deep Dark, the area was also susceptible to incursions FROM the deep dark. Though Sherk assured them that the incursions were usually short lived due to the lack of food, water, or prey in and around the desert.

Regardless, Sherk was basically the clan's watchmen while they were prepping for their missions. One of which was due in a few months.

Anderson shuddered as Dusty the dragon landed on the dune next to the camp and was surprised to see several NEW tents in place.

And new faces.

"They're new." Said Sherk, as if reading his mind.

"Yeah." Anderson agreed. "Second party must have shown up while we were out."

He couldn't see it, but under his helmet Sherk cocked an eyebrow at the statement as he dismounted dusty.

Master Sergeant Nguyen strode up to meet the disembarking duo, Heintz right behind him reading some notes in her green book.

"Anderson." Nguyen greeted as he held out his hand. Anderson shook it happily. "Good news? Hey Sherk!" He said with a friendly wave. Sherk raised a fist in the air in response before getting back to his dragon.

"Yeah. Doc and the gang are comin along, should be here in a week or so." He answered. Then he lowered his voice. "New guys?" He asked quietly.

"Yeah." Nguyen replied just as quietly. "Doorway opened up about two days ago, bout fifty yards east. That's why we set up that big tent over there." He nodded at the largest of the new tents. "New comm room is in the middle one."

"Fuckin sweet." Anderson said with a nod. "What's the news?"

"All green on this side. Heintz weighed in. "But apparently some crazy shit went down in the capital."

"Yeah, I heard. Some kinda massive fire monster or something." Anderson confirmed. "People are talking about it a lot. Huge tragedy it sounds like."

"Yeah." Nguyen agreed. "Come on. One of the first things they sent through was some coffee. Turns out sticky was a barista for a while. Let's get a cup."

Hells yeah Sarge." Anderson said excitedly as he followed along behind them.

They didn't notice Sherk watching them out of the corner of his eye as he grabbed a few chunks of dried meat from his bag for Dusty and himself.

The old dwarf was used to keeping a close eye on this desert for invasions from the Deep Dark.

And he suspected that he was watching a different kind of invasion take place.

One that he didn't think Clan Dunebasher OR Clan Drakrid would be terribly okay with. Much less the Petravian government.

He'd have to keep his eyes a bit more open from now on.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w4twef/wait_is_this_just_gate_190/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (189/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w337qu/wait_is_this_just_gate_188/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w4tuy9/wait_is_this_just_gate_190/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (188/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w1rm7q/wait_is_this_just_gate_187/)

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Enjoy.

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"There. See? Not so bad." Amina said as she pulled off the last of James's bandages. "Little shave so everything evens out once the last few scales pop off, and a few months of letting it grow, and it'll look good as new."

James peered at his pink, raw, still somewhat scaled bald head. He ran his finger along a smooth, almost soft, burn scar that ran over his left temple. It had been the side of his head least shielded by the lance's magic during his last attack on the Elemental, and so it had gotten burned a bit worse than the right side of his head. Coupled with the delay in care and it had actually had a chance to set its scars before they'd gotten the almost miracle burn cream on his skin. With his left hand regrown and his bones mended it had ended up being his worst injury.

"Gonna have to comb it over the other way to cover that up." He said somewhat glumly. Then his new hand accidentally nicked the soft scar a bit with a claw. "Aah!" He exclaimed, more in shock than anything else.

Amina ran her hand over the soft skin, her finger emitting a dull amber glow that sealed the minute cut almost too fast for it to well up with any blood.

"That's fine." She said. "You were too pretty anyways. A scar or two should make you look nice and distinguished. Especially once you get old enough to start getting some grey around it.."

"Gee thanks." James said sarcastically. "Really sells me on it." He didn't want to admit that the image in his head did look kind of badass.

Amina plucked a scale off of James's other temple prematurely, causing him to suck in breath through gritted teeth in surprise.

"Don't be an ass." She scolded him, but her tone was playful. "We have to get ready." She said as she tossed the scale in the nearby bin and wrapped her arms around him.

"Yeah." He replied. "It's getting warmer."

And it was. Everyone had noticed it over the past week or so. Icicles were occasionally dripping in the afternoons, and some of the streets were going from icy to muddy.

Winter was coming to an end.

Which meant that summer, and James and Amina's trip, was around the corner.

As if sensing the silent moment between the two, the door sounded with a knock. The two of them glanced at each other curiously before Amina went to answer. James rubbed off a little bit of ointment that was lingering on his head and shoulder before tying up his robe and going to join her.

"James?" Amina called.

"Yeah, I'm comin'!" He answered back.

And as he stepped out into the main room, and to where he could see the door he was met with an interesting view.

Standing at the door of their room was a werewolf, though James struggled to relate him to the werewolves he'd seen here at the capital since getting here.

They were old. In fact if the lifespan that Kela had explained to him over a year before was anything to go by, James figured that they had to be well into their high hundred. Their fur was a mixture of black and dark grey that was worn to leather in some areas. Their right eye was milky, and they hunched over a gnarled cane that reminded James of countless monks from cartoons and animes.

They were also wearing a set simultaneously ornate, and yet remarkably simple, white robes with light green trim and embroidery.

The old wolf's good eye fixed itself on James's left hand.

"So it is true." Said the old wolf with a voice that sounded much more youthful than James had expected. "Someone HAS been touched by the goddess." He walked forward past Amina and gently took the hand into his own, looking at it with fascination. "So you are Captain Choi?" The wolf asked.

"Uuuuh... yeah?" James answered, a little off-put by the sudden intrusion to his personal space by the stranger. Especially because it was about a part of himself that he still wasn't comfortable with itself. "I'm sorry, what's going on?"

Before James realized what was happening the old man was pulling him out into the hallway by the hand.

"You have been summoned by the Lunar Council." The old wolf said as he pulled James past the doorway. James was surprised to see several other, much larger and younger, wolves standing out in the hallway wearing armor that made Kela's suits look like training armor. It was in the same white and green fashion as the old man's robes.

Each of them wore gauntlets that fully encased their claws.

The tips of the claws looked like plain, shiny, metal instead of the enamel coating that the rest of their armor was covered in.

James had a feeling that it was silver.

James looked back at Amina in alarm and was surprised to see a similar look of confusion on her face as well.

"What's going on?" He yelled at the old wolf. "Let me go!" He demanded as he attempted to pry the clawed hand off of his arm. But as old as the wolf was, his grip was like a vice. And when James began to draw magic into his right hand one of the gauntleted claws clamped down onto his shoulder. It pressed just enough that James worried it might have been drawing blood. "Hey!" He exclaimed.

"Don't." Said the hand's owner as he looked back at them. This wolf's fur was almost red, like a fox, and their voice was astonishingly deep.

"Trelen!" Said the King's familiar voice as he rounded the corner in front of them, several guards in tow. His throat was glowing with the familiar magic that amplified his voice. **"This isn't the appropriate way to do this and you know it!"**

And just like that James's hand was free as the old wolf placed his cane in front of him and... kind of... bowed to the king.

"Your highness." The old wolf, Trelen apparently, said. "The council has summoned the hero. They must discuss the nature of his pack mate's fate. And we have to assess the nature of the Goddess's blessing."

"And were you planning on taking him without even telling anyone?" King Farrick asked sternly. "Were you going to traipse across the country in the tail end of winter with him only wearing his pajamas?"

Trelen looked back at James, his one good eyes seeming to notice James's attire for the first time as Amina got to James and seemed to stand between the two of them. James wondered when she'd gotten her sword on her hip.

"Of course not." Trelen replied. "We would have provided him with clothes, of course."

King Farrick stared at the old wolf with a raised eyebrow.

"I believe there are certain formalities that will need to be observed before you can simply whisk him away, TRELEN." The King said. "Besides, his own government must be informed and asked for approval first. Or else you risk a political transgression that MY kingdom would be on the hook for."

Trelen held his hands up in supplication.

"As you wish your majesty." He said. "But you know I serve the council. And they will not take NO for an answer on this matter."

"Uhhh. Okay." James said. "I'm.... I'm right here guys." He waved sarcastically. "What the hell is going on?"

"It appears, Captain Choi, that you're going on a bit of a trip." The King answered, still glaring daggers at the old wolf, who was making a point of not noticing.

\---

"And what's the purpose of this trip again Captain?" General Krick asked a few hours later after James had learned the full extent of what was going on. James was happy to be dealing with Krick again instead of Grant, though the General seemed stiffer now.

"Um." James began. "So apparently, the thing that happened with Kela. The whole "Champion of a god' thing. Ummm... Is a huge deal." He emoted a bit with his hand, making a point of keeping the left one in the camera's view. "So is.... killing one, apparently. The fact that I was her pack leader and I killed her is also something of a hot subject as well." He held up the left hand directly in front of him for a minute. "And apparently actually SPEAKING to a god or goddess is also a huge deal. And getting a.... GIFT... from one is even uhhh... huger?"

"And this necessitates a three week trip to a city of werewolves who are some kind of cult?" The General asked.

"Mmmm. Less a cult and more of a.... religious enclave? And also the governing body of all the werewolves on the continent, and maybe.... all werewolves?" He shook his head. "I don't know, I'm not to sure about

that part. The old guy was super vague about... well... everything." He looked back up. "And from the sounds of things this could be one of those 'cause an international incident' things if I try NOT to go."

General Krick stared at the camera with a blank expression.

"Captain Choi... do you WANT to go?" He asked simply.

"I mean.... kind of?" He admitted. "Amina says that it's supposed to be one of the coolest places in the land. And apparently Humans aren't allowed there unless they've been approved for being turned into werwolves. " He shook his head a bit. "Plus... I guess they're going to let me take part in Kela's interment." He said somberly. "I'd kind of like to do that."

The general seemed to deflate.

"What kind of deadline are they giving us on our decision?" He asked simply.

"A.S.A.P. Sir." James answered.

Krick sighed deeply as he looked off screen and shook his head. "I'll talk to the secretary. Email a list of their demands and allowances." He said begrudgingly before turning off his side of the channel.

James turned back to see a rather nonplussed Werner sitting in her usual spot. "Whatever." She said as she went back to reading whatever financial paperwork she had been going over when James had entered the room.

"I call dibs on escort." Vickers said to James's surprise. "If they allow one."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w40n84/wait_is_this_just_gate_189/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (188/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w1rl3j/wait_is_this_just_gate_187/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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"That's fine." She said. "You were too pretty anyways. A scar or two should make you look nice and distinguished. Especially once you get old enough to start getting some grey around it.."

"Gee thanks." James said sarcastically. "Really sells me on it." He didn't want to admit that the image in his head did look kind of badass.

Amina plucked a scale off of James's other temple prematurely, causing him to suck in breath through gritted teeth in surprise.

"Don't be an ass." She scolded him, but her tone was playful. "We have to get ready." She said as she tossed the scale in the nearby bin and wrapped her arms around him.

"Yeah." He replied. "It's getting warmer."

And it was. Everyone had noticed it over the past week or so. Icicles were occasionally dripping in the afternoons, and some of the streets were going from icy to muddy.

Winter was coming to an end.

Which meant that summer, and James and Amina's trip, was around the corner.

As if sensing the silent moment between the two, the door sounded with a knock. The two of them glanced at each other curiously before Amina went to answer. James rubbed off a little bit of ointment that was lingering on his head and shoulder before tying up his robe and going to join her.

"James?" Amina called.

"Yeah, I'm comin'!" He answered back.

And as he stepped out into the main room, and to where he could see the door he was met with an interesting view.

Standing at the door of their room was a werewolf, though James struggled to relate him to the werewolves he'd seen here at the capital since getting here.

They were old. In fact if the lifespan that Kela had explained to him over a year before was anything to go by, James figured that they had to be well into their high hundred. Their fur was a mixture of black and dark grey that was worn to leather in some areas. Their right eye was milky, and they hunched over a gnarled cane that reminded James of countless monks from cartoons and animes.

They were also wearing a set simultaneously ornate, and yet remarkably simple, white robes with light green trim and embroidery.

The old wolf's good eye fixed itself on James's left hand.

"So it is true." Said the old wolf with a voice that sounded much more youthful than James had expected. "Someone HAS been touched by the goddess." He walked forward past Amina and gently took the hand into his own, looking at it with fascination. "So you are Captain Choi?" The wolf asked.

"Uuuuh... yeah?" James answered, a little off-put by the sudden intrusion to his personal space by the stranger. Especially because it was about a part of himself that he still wasn't comfortable with itself. "I'm sorry, what's going on?"

Before James realized what was happening the old man was pulling him out into the hallway by the hand.

"You have been summoned by the Lunar Council." The old wolf said as he pulled James past the doorway. James was surprised to see several other, much larger and younger, wolves standing out in the hallway wearing armor that made Kela's suits look like training armor. It was in the same white and green fashion as the old man's robes.

Each of them wore gauntlets that fully encased their claws.

The tips of the claws looked like plain, shiny, metal instead of the enamel coating that the rest of their armor was covered in.

James had a feeling that it was silver.

James looked back at Amina in alarm and was surprised to see a similar look of confusion on her face as well.

"What's going on?" He yelled at the old wolf. "Let me go!" He demanded as he attempted to pry the clawed hand off of his arm. But as old as the wolf was, his grip was like a vice. And when James began to draw magic into his right hand one of the gauntleted claws clamped down onto his shoulder. It pressed just enough that James worried it might have been drawing blood. "Hey!" He exclaimed.

"Don't." Said the hand's owner as he looked back at them. This wolf's fur was almost red, like a fox, and their voice was astonishingly deep.

"Trelen!" Said the King's familiar voice as he rounded the corner in front of them, several guards in tow. His throat was glowing with the familiar magic that amplified his voice. **"This isn't the appropriate way to do this and you know it!"**

And just like that James's hand was free as the old wolf placed his cane in front of him and... kind of... bowed to the king.

"Your highness." The old wolf, Trelen apparently, said. "The council has summoned the hero. They must discuss the nature of his pack mate's fate. And we have to assess the nature of the Goddess's blessing."

"And were you planning on taking him without even telling anyone?" King Farrick asked sternly. "Were you going to traipse across the country in the tail end of winter with him only wearing his pajamas?"

Trelen looked back at James, his one good eyes seeming to notice James's attire for the first time as Amina got to James and seemed to stand between the two of them. James wondered when she'd gotten her sword on her hip.

"Of course not." Trelen replied. "We would have provided him with clothes, of course."

King Farrick stared at the old wolf with a raised eyebrow.

"I believe there are certain formalities that will need to be observed before you can simply whisk him away, TRELEN." The King said. "Besides, his own government must be informed and asked for approval first. Or else you risk a political transgression that MY kingdom would be on the hook for."

Trelen held his hands up in supplication.

"As you wish your majesty." He said. "But you know I serve the council. And they will not take NO for an answer on this matter."

"Uhhh. Okay." James said. "I'm.... I'm right here guys." He waved sarcastically. "What the hell is going on?"

"It appears, Captain Choi, that you're going on a bit of a trip." The King answered, still glaring daggers at the old wolf, who was making a point of not noticing.

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"And what's the purpose of this trip again Captain?" General Krick asked a few hours later after James had learned the full extent of what was going on. James was happy to be dealing with Krick again instead of Grant, though the General seemed stiffer now.

"Um." James began. "So apparently, the thing that happened with Kela. The whole "Champion of a god' thing. Ummm... Is a huge deal." He emoted a bit with his hand, making a point of keeping the left one in the camera's view. "So is.... killing one, apparently. The fact that I was her pack leader and I killed her is also something of a hot subject as well." He held up the left hand directly in front of him for a minute. "And apparently actually SPEAKING to a god or goddess is also a huge deal. And getting a.... GIFT... from one is even uhhh... huger?"

"And this necessitates a three week trip to a city of werewolves who are some kind of cult?" The General asked.

"Mmmm. Less a cult and more of a.... religious enclave? And also the governing body of all the werewolves on the continent, and maybe.... all werewolves?" He shook his head. "I don't know, I'm not to sure about that part. The old guy was super vague about... well... everything." He looked back up. "And from the sounds of things this could be one of those 'cause an international incident' things if I try NOT to go."

General Krick stared at the camera with a blank expression.

"Captain Choi... do you WANT to go?" He asked simply.

"I mean.... kind of?" He admitted. "Amina says that it's supposed to be one of the coolest places in the land. And apparently Humans aren't allowed there unless they've been approved for being turned into werwolves. " He shook his head a bit. "Plus... I guess they're going to let me take part in Kela's interment." He said somberly. "I'd kind of like to do that."

The general seemed to deflate.

"What kind of deadline are they giving us on our decision?" He asked simply.

"A.S.A.P. Sir." James answered.

Krick sighed deeply as he looked off screen and shook his head. "I'll talk to the secretary. Email a list of their demands and allowances." He said begrudgingly before turning off his side of the channel.

James turned back to see a rather nonplussed Werner sitting in her usual spot. "Whatever." She said as she went back to reading whatever financial paperwork she had been going over when James had entered the room.

"I call dibs on escort." Vickers said to James's surprise. "If they allow one."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w40m2q/wait_is_this_just_gate_189/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (187/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vzdt3c/wait_is_this_just_gate_186/)

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Enjoy.

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By the time James left the communication room, some four hours later, he felt a lot better.

The Secretary had left his side after another hour or so, mostly wheedling on and on about future rescue and relief missions, or impacting a local economy, or engaging in military actions without permission. James ignored almost all of it, simply grunting or going "understood sir" whenever there was a pause. It seemed to work. Or maybe Grant just gave up.

Vickers had continued to run tests on the wolf hand, and also on some of the burn scales.

Those had caused more questions than they answered.

According to the tests the hand was James's. It had his DNA, it had his blood type, his tissue type, everything except the hand-held scanner read the hand as being one hundred percent James Choi.

It just had a completely different bone structure, hyper dense muscle fibers, and nerve bundles that looked like nothing the scientists back home had ever seen before.

In short it was a whole new set of hardware running the same old software.

The scales were a different story entirely. They DID NOT read as being made of James's body the way the hand did. In fact, the analyzer didn't know what to make of them other than being vaguely reptilian.

The fact that once they flaked off, they left perfectly healthy, albeit raw, skin that looked almost as if it had never been burned was astonishing to the earth scientists. James assured them that he'd still have scars in a few places where the burns had been a bit worse off. But other than that he'd probably look good as new in a week or so. They requested samples, and he assured them that he'd do what he could. Once the relief effort died down and the demand dropped. The ointment was in short supply at the moment.

Finally once the scientists had run out of ideas on how to poke and prod him, James had requested some screen time with his family. It had taken a while to get them into the room but eventually James had gotten almost an hour with his mom and brother.

That had probably been the best bit of healing he'd gotten since the fight. Plus his little bro had loved the new hand. But James had to bite his tongue.

He still wasn't a hundred percent sold on it.

He didn't think he ever would be. Not entirely.

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"Well, well, well." Said a familiar, and annoying, voice. "Didn't think I'd ever be the tall one." Artair said as he looked down at Alixan.

Alixan looked up from his position of mourning.

"Not exactly in the mood LITTLE brother." He replied.

Artair looked at him with startlingly sympathetic eyes. He held out his hand.

"Come on." Artair said. "Let's grab a drink. You're making the view of the courtyard all... sad."

Alixan lingered for a moment longer before wiping his eyes on his sleeve and taking the hand.

"Finally getting me that drink you owe me?" He asked as Artair lifted him to his feet.

"It's been five years." Artair countered. "Get over it."

They didn't notice Amina watching from a nearby window as they walked off the castle grounds.

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James and Amina met up in the hall outside of the castle kitchen. They'd agreed to the plan shortly after the statue's unveiling. Though Amina was a bit surprised to see Vickers tagging along.

"He seems like a good kid." Vickers was saying to James as they walked up. "That's good energy to have in your corner."

"Evening darling." Amina said as she and James embraced. "Chief?"

"Evening princess." Vickers replied.

"Are you here for.... dinner?" She asked.

Vickers smiled. Amina had never seen him smile when it wasn't meant to intimidate someone. It was unnerving.

"Choi let me in on the plan." Vickers answered. "Personally? Don't know this Jurl guy. But... I get the sentiment. Me and the wolf may not have been friends or anything. But I understand the sacrifice. Both... the Captain's. And her family's. Luckily for ole Choi here I know a thing or two about making pies."

"Pies?" She wondered. "I thought we were making-"

"Different name. Same thing." Vickers assured her with a raised hand. "And my only price is that I get a slice." He shrugged. "Or two.... maybe three."

James just smiled, letting Amina know that everything was okay. And with that the three of them walked in.

Three hours later Amina and James were standing in front of the door that used to be Kela's. Amina's arms were tired from kneading and spinning dough, a talent that Vickers had taught both her and James. It had been fun. But also exhausting.

He'd taught them how to make what he had called thin crust pizzas. James had practically been salivating as they'd come out of the oven. One was simply covered with a spicy red sauce, blobs of randomly placed white cheese, and scattered greens. The other was covered in a similar red sauce but was coated edge to edge in cheese and had crumbles of candied bacon, onions, and bits of ground sausage. Vickers had stayed behind to make himself a smaller pizza for himself as they'd left, and he'd wished them luck with what they all knew was going to be a difficult night.

"Ready for this?" James asked as he held out his left hand. His pizza was balancing on his right hand.

Amina looked down at the hand, then switched her pizza over to her left hand and took it.

"No." She admitted as she looked back at the door.

"Yeah." James agreed. "Me neither. Let's get to it though."

He was about to kick the bottom of the door in place of a knock. But before he could it creaked open. Mela's face peaked out.

"Aunty Mina?" She asked as she rubbed her eyes. "What's that smell?"

Of course, the food had given them away.

"This..." James said as he lowered down and held the pizza down in front of Mela, her little nose twitching as she sniffed deeply. "Is a dish from my home. Remember the burgers?" He asked.

"Yeah!" She said, suddenly excited. "I love burgers!"

"Well this is a pizza. It's just as good." James moved it forward. "Is your dad here?"

Mela reached out and grabbed the pan with both of her small hands.

"Careful. It's hot." James cautioned.

"Dadas in the side room. The one that smells like you Uncu James. He's been sleeping a lot."

This time Amina lowered down and gave Mela's head a tussle.

"Why don't you go set that down for you and Tilo then go get him for us okay?" She said with a smile. "We want to talk to him for a bit. See how he's doing."

"Okay." Mela said.

James and Amina stepped in behind her as she carried the, slightly too large for her, pizza to the table.

It was going to be a long night.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w338ug/wait_is_this_just_gate_188/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (187/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vzdraq/wait_is_this_just_gate_186/) /
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Wait, is this just GATE? (186/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vzb1oh/wait_is_this_just_gate_185/)

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*(****Grumbles)*** *Fuckin two years with no positives and I get it out of nowhere? FUCKING BULLSHIT!*

Enjoy.

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James tuned out the Secretary's rambling, droning, lecture about how he couldn't just run headlong into danger as he pressed the needle into the vein in his new hand. He drew what had to be the twentieth vial of blood from it.

It didn't hurt to do it, oddly. The little pinprick wounds seemed to heal almost instantly too. They didn't even let any blood drip out when he forgot to occlude before pulling the needle out.

He also sent hair, skin, and nail samples. All equally painless. All healed equally fast. Well, the nails at least took a few minutes at least. But they were still faster than they should have been.

The scientists on the other side were reading the analyzer's data in real time. They also wanted pictures from every angle, constantly asking James to hold it up for the camera at different angles. And they wanted video of what it was capable of. James gave them at least a taste of that part. He did so by picking up one of the metal serving trays on the table and EASILY punching a hole through it with his new middle finger, before using the rest of the hand to fuld it in half and then begin condensing it into a ball.

Through all of it the Secretary never did more than slow down for a moment or two as he watched the displays of newfound strength. Though when James casually folded the tray with one hand he did stop long enough to say "God damn." Before continuing with his rant.

Vickers was off to the side running the analyzer as James continued pulling the samples. But he was also curiously watching James perform the minor feats of strength. He looked at his own hand as he continued running the tests, flexing it a little.

"So, Captain Choi. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you?" Secretary Grant asked.

James nodded, fighting not to roll his eyes. "Don't rush into every bit of danger as soon as I can. Consult with you guys first." He said in a monotone.

Grant ignored the sarcasm and disdain. "And if you are gonna rush into a fight. Try having a strategy OTHER than killin yourself."

"Right." James said as he continued poking and prodding the hand. "Oh, almost forgot sir." James added.

"What is it son?" The secretary asked. James hated the secretary's habit of calling him that. And he had a feeling Vickers didn't get the same treatment.

"I forgot to mention that the mages here have managed to create and are manufacturing some FANTASTIC burn ointments." James finished.

"Is that so?" Grant asked.

James unwrapped his head, revealing the MOSTLY faded and flaked away scales on his head.

"What in god's name?" Grant asked as he peered at the screen on his side of the connection.

Vickers just muttered and shook his head.

"We need samples!" Someone in the room with grant yelled from the background.

\----------

Alixan sat at the base of the new statue in the courtyard.

He'd spent the past few weeks helping organize the relief efforts in the city. Helping move people into their new homes. Moving supplies around.

He hadn't slept in days.

He'd thought that his feelings for Kela had been dead for years. Just a past fancy that had faded years ago.

He had a betrothed of his own. Melady of the Dyeriss. He even liked her. Thought he might even come to love her someday too.

He thought he'd put Kela behind him.

Had done everything in his power TO put her behind him.

But when he'd heard the news of the Elemental, he'd mounted his new griffin as fast as he could and rode with his talon as fast as they were able to move.

Then he'd gotten here, and the battle had already been over.

And the one woman he had ever cared for, had ever actually loved, was gone.

He didn't know what to feel now.

He'd lost people before. In battles. To diseases. Sometimes just to bad luck.

He'd lost her once before too. But that had been at his own doing.

This was just.... different.

He'd been putting as much of his energy as he could find into the relief effort just to ensure that he didn't have to think about it.

But the relief effort was all but over. Now it was just the long, slow, boring road to rebuilding. He'd help with that too, if he could.

But right now. Sitting in this empty courtyard at the bottom of her memorial statue.

Right now, it just hurt.

Hurt in a way that he hadn't felt since he was just a child and his father had told them of their mother's death.

Only now he was old enough to comprehend the hurt in his heart.

And as if that wasn't bad enough, he had to hate himself a little bit.

Because he'd seen Jurl and the children.

Jurl, a man that he actually liked and respected.

And those two adorable little werepups that even now looked so much like their mother.

And even as sad as they were.

As broken as Jurl had looked.

As awful as their lives had just become.

He'd been jealous.

Alixan hung his head in between his legs and stayed that way for a while. Hating himself for reasons that didn't even make sense.

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Far away. On a different continent. In a room hidden in a mountain that was inaccessible to all except The Agency. A meeting took place involving The Agency's surviving members.

News of the Elemental's destruction of the Petravian capital had spread far, and fast.

And as angry as the Agency was about the prior debacle with the grinner, the envoy of the vanishing blight, and MOST infuriatingly with this other Earth man.

The one who had insulted them so badly and killed three of their founding members with his trick.

This news made them all smile.

And new plans began to form around the new weakness in the country that had scorned them so much lately.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/w1rm7q/wait_is_this_just_gate_187/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (186/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vy9cuh/wait_is_this_just_gate_185/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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He'd thought that his feelings for Kela had been dead for years. Just a past fancy that had faded years ago.

He had a betrothed of his own. Melady of the Dyeriss. He even liked her. Thought he might even come to love her someday too.

He thought he'd put Kela behind him.

Had done everything in his power TO put her behind him.

But when he'd heard the news of the Elemental, he'd mounted his new griffin as fast as he could and rode with his talon as fast as they were able to move.

Then he'd gotten here, and the battle had already been over.

And the one woman he had ever cared for, had ever actually loved, was gone.

He didn't know what to feel now.

He'd lost people before. In battles. To diseases. Sometimes just to bad luck.

He'd lost her once before too. But that had been at his own doing.

This was just.... different.

He'd been putting as much of his energy as he could find into the relief effort just to ensure that he didn't have to think about it.

But the relief effort was all but over. Now it was just the long, slow, boring road to rebuilding. He'd help with that too, if he could.

But right now. Sitting in this empty courtyard at the bottom of her memorial statue.

Right now, it just hurt.

Hurt in a way that he hadn't felt since he was just a child and his father had told them of their mother's death.

Only now he was old enough to comprehend the hurt in his heart.

And as if that wasn't bad enough, he had to hate himself a little bit.

Because he'd seen Jurl and the children.

Jurl, a man that he actually liked and respected.

And those two adorable little werepups that even now looked so much like their mother.

And even as sad as they were.

As broken as Jurl had looked.

As awful as their lives had just become.

He'd been jealous.

Alixan hung his head in between his legs and stayed that way for a while. Hating himself for reasons that didn't even make sense.

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Far away. On a different continent. In a room hidden in a mountain that was inaccessible to all except The Agency. A meeting took place involving The Agency's surviving members.

News of the Elemental's destruction of the Petravian capital had spread far, and fast.

And as angry as the Agency was about the prior debacle with the grinner, the envoy of the vanishing blight, and MOST infuriatingly with this other Earth man.

The one who had insulted them so badly and killed three of their founding members with his trick.

This news made them all smile.

And new plans began to form around the new weakness in the country that had scorned them so much lately.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/w1rl3j/wait_is_this_just_gate_187/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (185/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vww51t/wait_is_this_just_gate_184/)

Writer's note: Bit of a short one. Dealing with some kind of stomach bug. That's also why I didn't post yesterday. WHOO!

Enjoy.

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"A little over two months ago." King Farrick began from the balcony overlooking the castle's main courtyard. He was using his voice of authority so that everyone could hear him, though not at maximum power.

The main gate was opened so people could come into the castle grounds, and the courtyard itself had been temporarily cleared so that it could be used as standing room for the crowds.

"A little over two months ago." He repeated. "A flame elemental erupted in our city's southeast district. Though I suppose you didn't need me to tell you that. We've all seen the damage it's done." He took a deep breath as he looked out at the crowd. "We don't know how it manifested. Or how it grew to such immense size so rapidly. It is an unfortunate side effect of its destruction that there is not a lot that can be found to tell us of its creation, as almost all of that evidence was incinerated." The King nodded his head a bit. "It is likely that we will never know how it came to be."

The crowd murmured a bit. They understood, but it still wasn't what they wanted to hear.

"What we do know." The King continued. "Is that its emergence. The sheer explosive power and heat of its creation.... Killed an estimated two to three thousand people. Either incinerating them, or crushing them in the concussive blast or the destruction of their homes and businesses."

The crowd gasped at the number.

"We know that another thousand or so were killed in the ensuing battle to defeat the creature afterwards. It killed indiscriminately, killing royal guards, killing citizens who fought to protect their homes and loved ones, killing innocent bystanders who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time." He hung his head, and James and Amina could see the tear that slipped out of his eye as he fought to keep his emotions under control. "And that is to say nothing of the people we lost even after the battle had ended and the elemental had been sealed away and destroyed. People who were caught in fires, or who succumbed to their injuries later on."

He took another deep breath.

"Sadly." He began. "Even with the power that comes with being a king. I do not have the ability to turn back time. I do not have the ability to bring the dead back to life or undo the damage that has been done to our city. To our families. Many of which have been shattered by this terrible occurrence."

James couldn't help but look over to Jurl and the two pups standing nearby. Even months later, Jurl looked like he hadn't slept. Mela had her face pressed into his leg as he rubbed the back of her head.

"What I can do..." King Farrick shook his head lightly. "What I can do is promise you. Each and every one of you. That this city will rebuild. The area that was devastated by the Elemental will stand tall once more. The families that were destroyed shall be remembered and shall always have a home here in the capital, and they shall have their choice of the buildings rebuilt in the area, if they want them. The fallen shall be honored and shown the greatest respect our people are capable of giving them."

James was reminded of the rapidly built, temporary, homes that had been built throughout the city to help get the displaced citizens into actual

buildings instead of tents. They weren't much, barely larger than cabins or RV's back on Earth. But they were better insulated and had lockable doors. On top of that City guards delivered bundles of food to them every few days. Mostly rice, and bread, and other simple foods. But it was a start.

"And so." The King continued. "In honoring the fallen, we have built this monument to them." He gestured to the two guards standing near the covered statue. Amina pressed into James's side as they grabbed at the drawstrings. "It is made of the very thing they died trying to slay. And on it is listed the names of every person we could confirm as having died to the elemental. These names have no ranks. No titles. And only one of them has been given any honor higher than any of the others. That person is the one who can be said to have done the most devastating damage to the elemental, who made a sacrifice not only of their life. But of their family. And of their own soul. Which now resides in the Moon Goddess's halls of eternity."

He gave another signal, and the two guards pulled on their ropes.

The crowd gasped as the cover fell off.

Underneath was a nearly twenty-foot-tall likeness of Kela standing on a massive column that had countless names engraved on it. She was wearing her standard armor, minus the helmet, and was resting her hands on the head of her battle-axe. James couldn't help but be amazed at how startling the likeness was.

That and the fact that the whole thing was made of Elemental Obsidian.

He wrapped his arms around Amina, who had tucked her face into him after she'd seen it.

"For those of you who don't know." The King said, breaking the silent awe of the gathering. "That is Elemental Obsidian. It is made from the remains of the elemental that caused this destruction." He waited a moment as the crowd murmured. "Normally. The kingdom would use that newfound, or in this case newly created, reserve to bolster its coffers." He shook his head. "But not this time." He said. "This time the money and materials we gain from it shall be put entirely to the recovery effort. And any excess once we have rebuilt, shall be granted to the families of the fallen. That we may attempt to bring our city back to its former glory and help heal those wounds that run deeper than the ones on our bodies." He smiled weakly. "Even if only a little bit."

He let the crowd murmur for a bit longer.

"Gentle people of Petravus. That is all I have for you today. Any more would be too much. There are food carts and ale for those who want it. Stay safe. Look out for you and yours. And never be afraid to lend a hand." The king said before turning around and stepping away from the balcony. He placed a hand on Jurl's shoulder as he passed.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vzdt3c/wait_is_this_just_gate_186/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (185/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vww40a/wait_is_this_just_gate_184/) /
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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vzdraq/wait_is_this_just_gate_186/)

Wait, is this just GATE?(184/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vumdhj/wait_is_this_just_gate_183/)

Writer's note: And thus, recovery begins.

Enjoy.

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When James and Amina finally emerged from their room, nearly a week later, they did so together.

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relationship that he and Kela had had in their youth. The two siblings spent nearly three hours talking, and crying, and reminiscing about the mutual friend before Alixan finally took off to help with the relief efforts. James spent most of the conversation keeping the tea and wine flowing as he stayed out of the way.

Then the day came when James woke up to find Amina strapping her armor and weapons back on.

He watched as she finished strapping on her breastplate. She ran her hands over it, looking at herself in the mirror with eyes that spoke to the sorrow that still lingered.

James had a feeling that they'd probably look like that for a long time. Maybe even for the rest of her lift.

He walked up behind her and places his hands... both of them... on her shoulders.

"You sure you're ready for this?" He asked. "You don't have to go back out if you're not. People will understand."

"I have to." She replied as she grabbed his left hand and held it on her shoulder. "There are still a lot of people out there who need help. And I'm not doing anything while I sit here crying." She looked back at him. "Besides... SHE... would be out there helping already."

James chuckled a bit. "She'd've spent five minutes crying if you'd been in her state, and then she'd have been running into fires to save people."

Amina smiled weakly at the joke. "Only five minutes?" She asked.

James smiled back. "In fairness; I probably would've only gotten one." He shrugged a little. "And she'd probably have called it a great day if it had been Vickers."

That finally got her to laugh.

"You're probably right about that one." She replied. Then the smile faded. "It's going to be weird not having her at my side out there." She said.

James just nodded, and they stood like that for a moment. "I'll go with." He said at last. "At least to the gate anyways. I need to get out of this room."

"Are you sure?" She asked. "What about your injuries?"

James stretched a little, wincing as he did. "A few hurt. But mostly they just feel... tight." He said as he rolled his arm. "Arm feels a lot better though. Healers did a good job."

"Good." She replied.

And a few minutes later they walked out of the room together, holding hands.

Over the next few weeks James noticed that whenever they walked together Amina would stay on his left side. But he never mentioned it.

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Most of them were castle staff, and their families, who had been displaced by the Elemental's destruction. But there were also some who simply had no other place to go. People whose homes had been utterly destroyed while they'd been out of them, and who had no family they could get to until after the winter snows had cleared up.

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But the thing James noticed most was the dark. It was still winter. Yet despite that, when James and Amina finally stepped outside the world was as dark as the sun was setting.

Soot and ash covered everything in sight.

James was reminded of the devastation that had nearly befallen Jadesport only a few months earlier. How the thermobaric missiles had burned the land for miles outside of the port city, and coated it in ashes as well.

But that had been different.

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In the time it had taken James to get inside to check on the others, to find out what to do, and to equip himself with the ill-fated gear Amina had given him from the armory, the Elemental had bean wreaking destruction upon the capital.

He'd seen that from on the back of Amina's griffin as they'd ridden to battle.

But the air had been full of smoke and embers, and he'd been focused on the elemental. Hell, he'd been practically obsesses with getting in to fight it.

Either way he hadn't payed any attention to the city below.

Now that he was seeing it for the first time, even from this distance, he wondered how he'd ever missed it.

"Fuck." He said to himself as he leaned against the battlements of the wall.

\----------

A few hours later James walked out of the stables, happy to see that Steve was well taken care of.

The drake had been in a grumbly mood and had pushed James away the first few times he'd tried to give the massive lizard a hug. He'd clearly understood that all the pain he'd been in over the past week few weeks had been James's fault.

But Steve had eventually relented when James had thrown a frozen chicken carcass into his mouth. After that it was if all had been forgiven. Steve even sniffed at his scales with curiosity.

James let him, sitting on the ground and leaning up against Steve as the drake laid back down with his head pressing into James's left side. He sniffed the new hand for a moment before closing his eyes again.

James stayed like that for a while before leaving.

\----------

"It's been almost two weeks now sir, and based on what I've seen while out helping, my early comparison is pretty accurate." Vickers said to

the communication hub. "It's like someone dropped thermo, or a tac-nuke or something on the edge of a major city. Not total devastation. But not far off either."

"Well. I'm glad you and Captain Choi were able to help out Chief." Secretary Grant said from the other side. "I'd have preferred that it was done through proper channels, but given the situation I suppose that can be overlooked in favor of expediency."

Vickers simply nodded, pretending that he couldn't see the smirk on Werner's face off to the side.

"How is your stock of ammo for the launcher?" Grant asked.

"Expended after the first day of fire fighting." Vickers replied. Then he continued before Grant could say anything else. "Saved a lot of lives too."

Grant seemed to get the message that Vickers didn't care for his complaints.

"That's good." He said in response. "How is the captain doing? Any word yet?"

"According to the little mage he's expected to be up and moving any day now. Just dealing with the last of his burns. Whether or not he and the princess are actually UP to getting out and about? Well. That's a different story."

"Well we need him to give a report on what occurred." Grant countered. "Plus we need to figure out just what you and the old mage guy meant about the whole 'wolf hand' thing."

Vickers nodded nonchalantly. Grant had asked about James's new hand almost every day since the battle.

He didn't care about how Choi was recovering, physically or emotionally. He only cared about the fact that the guy was the first EARTH human who'd ever become a sort of animal hybrid.

And he probably wanted to lecture Choi.

At least that part would be warranted.

But Vickers had earned a new respect for the young soldier.

After all he'd seen what Choi had done during the fight.

He hadn't been able to see much of it. He'd been wearing the fire hood, and running and gunning from on Tom's back.

But it had been hard to miss the laser-like, explosion laden, blue beams of magical light that had marked the soldier/caster's attacks.

And it had been impossible to miss the finale.

He'd thought the attacks were suicidal.

And after seeing Choi's injuries before the princess had tried to evac him, he'd seen just how devastating the damage had been to his body.

But Choi had just kept going. Over and over again.

Vickers couldn't imagine how much it must have hurt.

But he'd just kept going.

Vickers had seen people die to less.

Had thought that he'd seen Choi die too. Even after they'd pulled him from the ground, he'd thought Choi's chances of recovering were slim.

But the little bastard was tough. Much tougher than Vickers had ever thought he even could be.

Then Vickers had learned of the details of what had happened after.

How he'd earned his replacement hand.

Vickers wouldn't admit it. Not to the General or the Secretary, and definitely not to Werner's smug ass.

But Choi had become someone that Vickers could actually see himself respecting.

And maybe, some day, even following.

"Understood sir." He said, turning off the mental autopilot he'd been on throughout the conversation as he listened to the Secretary drone on about how they'd have to handle things like this in the future. "By the way, any word on when the General will be returning?"

Grant's face shifted ever so slightly at the question, his mask slipping for just a fraction of a second. But Vickers saw it, and his own mask didn't slip.

"He should be done in D.C. some time tomorrow." Grant said with a seemingly innocent smile. "We'll find out then."

"Well, hopefully he enjoys the trip." Vickers replied.

Grant smiled. "Have a good evening Chief." He said, still smiling. "Now if you'd please. Ambassador Werner and I have some things to discuss."

"Of course sir." Vickers said as he turned and left, ignoring Werner as he passed.

As he walked down the hall he practiced the thing he'd learned from one of the people helping out with the fires.

He held his fist up where he could see it and focused.

It was a lot harder than Choi and the others made it look.

But after a few minutes of walking he got the result he'd been focusing on.

The tips of his knuckles grew white with frost as the magical energy turned them into a super cooled focal point.

Then he tripped on a bit of carpeting that he hadn't been paying attention to and his focus broke.

"Dammit." he said to himself as he looked at the offending bit of carpet.

Still. He thought. *Better than yesterday.*

Wait, is this just GATE? (184/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vumccw/wait_is_this_just_gate_183/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Now that he was seeing it for the first time, even from this distance, he wondered how he'd ever missed it.

"Fuck." He said to himself as he leaned against the battlements of the wall.

\----------

A few hours later James walked out of the stables, happy to see that Steve was well taken care of.

The drake had been in a grumbly mood and had pushed James away the first few times he'd tried to give the massive lizard a hug. He'd clearly understood that all the pain he'd been in over the past week few weeks had been James's fault.

But Steve had eventually relented when James had thrown a frozen chicken carcass into his mouth. After that it was if all had been forgiven. Steve even sniffed at his scales with curiosity.

James let him, sitting on the ground and leaning up against Steve as the drake laid back down with his head pressing into James's left side. He sniffed the new hand for a moment before closing his eyes again.

James stayed like that for a while before leaving.

\----------

"It's been almost two weeks now sir, and based on what I've seen while out helping, my early comparison is pretty accurate." Vickers said to the communication hub. "It's like someone dropped thermo, or a tac-nuke or something on the edge of a major city. Not total devastation. But not far off either."

"Well. I'm glad you and Captain Choi were able to help out Chief." Secretary Grant said from the other side. "I'd have preferred that it was

done through proper channels, but given the situation I suppose that can be overlooked in favor of expediency."

Vickers simply nodded, pretending that he couldn't see the smirk on Werner's face off to the side.

"How is your stock of ammo for the launcher?" Grant asked.

"Expended after the first day of fire fighting." Vickers replied. Then he continued before Grant could say anything else. "Saved a lot of lives too."

Grant seemed to get the message that Vickers didn't care for his complaints.

"That's good." He said in response. "How is the captain doing? Any word yet?"

"According to the little mage he's expected to be up and moving any day now. Just dealing with the last of his burns. Whether or not he and the princess are actually UP to getting out and about? Well. That's a different story."

"Well we need him to give a report on what occurred." Grant countered. "Plus we need to figure out just what you and the old mage guy meant about the whole 'wolf hand' thing."

Vickers nodded nonchalantly. Grant had asked about James's new hand almost every day since the battle.

He didn't care about how Choi was recovering, physically or emotionally. He only cared about the fact that the guy was the first EARTH human who'd ever become a sort of animal hybrid.

And he probably wanted to lecture Choi.

At least that part would be warranted.

But Vickers had earned a new respect for the young soldier.

After all he'd seen what Choi had done during the fight.

He hadn't been able to see much of it. He'd been wearing the fire hood, and running and gunning from on Tom's back.

But it had been hard to miss the laser-like, explosion laden, blue beams of magical light that had marked the soldier/caster's attacks.

And it had been impossible to miss the finale.

He'd thought the attacks were suicidal.

And after seeing Choi's injuries before the princess had tried to evac him, he'd seen just how devastating the damage had been to his body.

But Choi had just kept going. Over and over again.

Vickers couldn't imagine how much it must have hurt.

But he'd just kept going.

Vickers had seen people die to less.

Had thought that he'd seen Choi die too. Even after they'd pulled him from the ground, he'd thought Choi's chances of recovering were slim.

But the little bastard was tough. Much tougher than Vickers had ever thought he even could be.

Then Vickers had learned of the details of what had happened after.

How he'd earned his replacement hand.

Vickers wouldn't admit it. Not to the General or the Secretary, and definitely not to Werner's smug ass.

But Choi had become someone that Vickers could actually see himself respecting.

And maybe, some day, even following.

"Understood sir." He said, turning off the mental autopilot he'd been on throughout the conversation as he listened to the Secretary drone on about how they'd have to handle things like this in the future. "By the way, any word on when the General will be returning?"

Grant's face shifted ever so slightly at the question, his mask slipping for just a fraction of a second. But Vickers saw it, and his own mask didn't slip.

"He should be done in D.C. some time tomorrow." Grant said with a seemingly innocent smile. "We'll find out then."

"Well, hopefully he enjoys the trip." Vickers replied.

Grant smiled. "Have a good evening Chief." He said, still smiling. "Now if you'd please. Ambassador Werner and I have some things to discuss."

"Of course sir." Vickers said as he turned and left, ignoring Werner as he passed.

As he walked down the hall he practiced the thing he'd learned from one of the people helping out with the fires.

He held his fist up where he could see it and focused.

It was a lot harder than Choi and the others made it look.

But after a few minutes of walking he got the result he'd been focusing on.

The tips of his knuckles grew white with frost as the magical energy turned them into a super cooled focal point.

Then he tripped on a bit of carpeting that he hadn't been paying attention to and his focus broke.

"Dammit." he said to himself as he looked at the offending bit of carpet.

Still. He thought. *Better than yesterday.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vy9cuh/wait_is_this_just_gate_185/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (183/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vtp8im/wait_is_this_just_gate_182/)

Writer's note: (infomercial voiceover) Do you struggle to feel any emotions due to years of trauma and emotional distress? Well good news. I'm going to help you find them.

Enjoy.

\~

James was still awake when Amina returned.

In fact, he hadn't slept for more than an hour or so for the past week.

From the look of her hair, and the bags under her eyes, the dirt on her armor, and, he hated to admit, but the smell he guessed she hadn't either.

"Hey." he said softly as he tucked his new hand under the blanket.

"Hi." She replied, practically whispering.

He wanted to ask her how she was. But it felt.... inadequate.

It wouldn't have mattered though. Before he could even say anything more she rushed through the room and into the bathroom.

James bit his tongue as he heard her begin removing armor and clothes on the other side of the door.

What was there to say?

I better try to clean up a bit. He thought.

James eased himself off the side of the bed slowly.

Everything hurt still. Well, everything minus his left arm.

His right arm ached as he pulled himself up by the bedpost.

His skin sent pain racing through his mind in spite of the numbing agents in the various medicines they'd drenched him in.

He took a moment to brace himself as he finally got up all the way. He took long, deep breaths as he fought with the pain.

Eventually, he turned and pulled off the towels that he'd been laying on. He'd layered them thick after the first day that he could move. He didn't want any of his mess on the actual bed itself, and his bandages were messy. Once they were off he put them in the basket set aside for dirty linens. Then he slowly shuffled over to the table where the fresh towels had been laid out.

He could hear the water running in the bathroom.

He could hear the gentle sobbing as he spread some of the towels out on his side of the bed.

He wanted to go knock on the door.

He wanted to go wrap her up in his arms and hold her.

But something inside him said that that was a bad idea.

Instead he went over and slowly, gently, made a pot of tea. Even with his hand mostly covered in scales and bandages, the heat of the pot caused a dull ache.

So he decided to hold it with the left hand.

The new hand.

Once the tea was steeping he made his way over to the dresser and pulled out one of the robes he'd taken to wearing during down time and gently put it on. He made sure to keep the new hand hidden in the sleeve.

He didn't want to see it. And he had a feeling that Amina didn't either.

Then he just waited.

And waited.

Eventually the teapot cooled to the point that he felt obligated to pour it out.

Then he waited longer.

Eventually the silence in that bathing room became concerning.

He stepped up to the door and reached up. But he froze.

What do I even say?

James knocked.

"Amina?" He asked quietly.

But she didn't answer.

He knocked again.

"Hon?"

Still nothing. He gently grasped the handle and slowly opened the door.

Amina was curled up in the tub, her hands gripping the side of the metal basin with her head resting on top of them. The water was eerily still around her, only wavering slightly as she breathed.

Not knowing what to do, James simply walked over and slowly lowered himself until he was sitting down next to her, looking away, on the floor. The tub left a line of fire on his back. But he didn't say anything about it.

"Did it have to happen?" She asked softly.

James didn't know what to say. So he didn't say anything.

"I don't think it did." She said after a few moments of silence.

James reached up with his right hand and dipped a finger in the water. It was cold.

He pulled the hand out and placed it against the side of the tub. After a moment his palm was emitting a small flame. The heat made the rest of his hand hurt. But he ignored that too.

"I..." He began. "I don't know." He shook his head a bit. "I don't think so either."

She shifted, moving her head to look away.

"Then why did you do it?" She asked.

And just like that, James knew what she really meant.

James looked away as well as he thought of the answer. It was the question that had been plaguing him for a while now.

He wanted to say that it was because he'd felt some kind of obligation to the order she'd remined of.

That it had been a mercy.

That it had been better than leaving her alive, and risking that she might lose control of the monstrous form.

There were a lot of different reasons that he could think of that were LOGICAL answers.

But none of them rang true.

None of them felt right.

"I..." He shook his head again. "I think I was scared." He admitted.

She didn't move or say anything in response.

"I think I was... scared of what would happen if I didn't." he said. "And I don't even know why."

She waited, as if expecting more. But after a moment she seemed to realize that none was coming.

"I wish you hadn't." She said at last.

James looked down at the wolf hand resting on the floor, out of her line of sight in case she turned his way.

"I wish I hadn't needed to." He said to himself. To the hand.

The two of them sat like that for a long time. Not speaking. Not moving.

Eventually James felt the need to break up the silence. "How did the um... preparations go?" He asked.

Amina took a deep breath before turning to him a little.

"They went well enough." She said. "The escorts leave with her tomorrow morning."

"I'm sorry I couldn't be there to help."

"It's okay." She said softly. "How are your burns?"

James held up his right arm and examined the small horn of scales poking out of one of the bandages on his hand.

"I'll.... live. I guess." He replied. "Just gonna be hurting for a while."

"You and Kela have one thing in common" She said after a moment.

James looked at her with a raised eyebrow. Or rather, a raised bandage brow.

"You both leapt at the first chance to kill yourselves." She finished.

James looked at her in shock.

"No I-" He began.

"I thought you were dead." She cut him off.

James's eyes widened.

"When you jumped off the griffin." She continued. "When you pushed me away and dove into the fire." She took a deep breath. "I thought you were dead."

"Amina." He tried to start.

"And then I tried to get to you once they'd sealed the trap. But none of them would let me through." She said, cutting him off again. Her voice was wavering as she tried to fight back tears. "And even after. After the Elemental had been sealed. I went in to look for you." She actually looked at him. "And I couldn't find you. I only found the lance. INSIDE the elemental. And I thought you were dead."

James didn't speak.

"And I thought that I-" She stammered. "That I had failed to stop you from killing yourself." She said. "And then you just popped up out of the ground. Burnt to a crisp and making STUPID jokes."

"I'm sorry." He said.

"And I can't even be mad at you." She said, ignoring the apology. "Because you were hurt. And because if you hadn't done it, it might not have worked."

"I'm.... sorry." He repeated.

"Then I had to face my best friend being a monster." She continued. Ignoring it again. "Not knowing who I was. Not being able to speak. Not really being Kela anymore. And you kill her."

He was about to apologize a third time. But once again she just kept talking.

"And I can't even be mad about that because she was in pain. And scared. And probably even more sad about it than I was. And because a DAMNED GODDESS blessed it."

"It's not a blessing." He said, and he was shocked at how harshly he said it.

It was Amina's turn to look at him in surprise.

James held the offending hand up where she could see.

Amina practically cringed at the sight of it.

Yeah. He thought. *She hates it.*

"I hate it." He admitted. "I'd've rather had the stump."

Amina stared at it for a moment. "It-" She began.

"Looks like hers." He cut her off. "Yeah. And that's what I hate most about it."

Then Amina did something that startled him. Before he could react she latched onto the hand with both of hers and pulled it towards her. She inspected it for a moment and then pressed it to her cheek.

And when James looked at her, still surprised at the sudden motion, he saw what she really felt about it.

She was feeling the touch.... the embrace even... of her now gone friend.

James suddenly felt bad about how he'd been approaching the hand.

He wrapped the hand under her chin, the long thin fingers reaching all the way to the back of her jaw.

Amina's eyes closed as she pressed it closer with her hands.

And the dam burst. Amina's eyes flooded with tears.

James stood up and quickly moved around the side of the tub, careful to keep the hand in place where it was, and stepped into the now warm water behind her. He didn't bother with the robe, or the bandages, he could call for the healers later.

For now, she needed him.

And she needed the hand.

She needed the illusion, however small, that it was the hand of her friend.

"I miss her." She said into his palm. "I miss her already.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vww51t/wait_is_this_just_gate_184/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (183/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vtp793/wait_is_this_just_gate_182/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vww40a/wait_is_this_just_gate_184/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (182/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vswkvu/wait_is_this_just_gate_181/)

Writer's note: [*Gird your loins*](https://qph.cf2.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-e1b184dfe66f705d300959d30c3bc754-lq) *for the last section.*

Enjoy.

\~

James stared at the new hand as he sat in the bed in his and Amina's room. He curled the long, claw tipped, fingers before extending them back out.

It wasn't Kela's hand. The fur was just a touch too dark for that. Plus Kela's hand was, at least presumably, still part of her. It was hard to tell since she wasn't in her normal form anymore, and never would be again.

He traced the muscles and veins that ran down the new appendage with his fingers. The fur ended about halfway up his forearm. Right where the burns had gone down past skin, and began taking muscle and cracking bone.

It didn't hurt. Not physically anyways. If anything his new arm felt better than any other part of him did. The rest of his body was swathed in glowing green bandages, most of which were soaked in different salves and ointments. Several even had the first signs of the dragon scales that came from the ointment Veliry had learned to make while in the Den months before.

But no. The physical pain wasn't what was keeping James from sleeping, which his body begged for.

It was the pain in his chest. That deep, nagging, ache that came with guilt and sorrow.

It didn't help that he'd been alone for the past three days.

He'd passed out only a few minutes after time had resumed. His exhaustion, the pain of what the goddess had done to his arm, the pain of all his other injuries, had caught up to him as he'd lingered there, vomiting and struggling to breath.

He'd woken up the next day as a healer had been helping Veliry put the finishing touches on changing his bandages. Jurl, Vickers, King Farrick, and most importantly Amina, hadn't been there.

Veliry had mostly wanted to question him about the hand. He'd told her everything. How he'd killed Kela. How time had stopped and the goddess had harassed him. The fiery, yet cold, excruciating pain right before time resumed. How he'd reflexively caught himself as he fell to the ground and had done so with a new, werewolf, claw at the end of his arm.

She hadn't comforted him. She hadn't tried to console him about what had happened. She'd simply written notes in a journal.

He'd had to pry information out of her in return.

That was how he'd found out that everyone else was helping out with the relief efforts. They were out putting out fires that were still out of control. They were helping get people out of collapsed buildings. They were tending to the wounded, or marshaling relief forces, or handing out food and blankets.

They were out doing all the things that James felt obligated to do.

Except Amina, who was leading a small team of werewolves in a ceremony to honor Kela's body, and transport it to a place called the Lunar Valley somewhere off to the west. Apparently as a champion of the goddess she'd earned a special form of internment in what was effectively the werewolf equivalent to Jerusalem, or Mecca or something. Between her size, and the ceremonial preparation that had to be done, it was a team effort.

According to Veliry, James would have normally been the one overseeing it, as Kela's pack leader prior to her transformation. But due to his injuries Amina, who was his fiance, and also Kela's former pack leader, was accepted as a stand in.

As if James didn't feel guilty enough already.

What was worse was the fact that; as bad as he felt about everything, he KNEW that Amina was in a worse place than him.

Mainly because he hadn't seen her for even a second since he'd woken up.

And he knew she was hurting.

James looked at the hand, so similar to Kela's. Yet just different enough.

He had a feeling that the Goddess's "boon" was going to haunt both him AND Amina.

He laid back in the bed and reached for the small bottle of sleeping aide that the healer had left him, ensuring him that sleep would be better for the healing process.

His new hand reached it easily.

\----------

"So you're telling me-" **KZZZT!** "oi dove into a giant-" **KXZT!** "monster the size of a damn sky scraper? And he li-" **BVVVVT!** General Krick asked as his signal cut in and out with interference.

"Yes sir." Vickers responded simply. He was still coated in ash and soot from the recovery efforts that he'd been taking part in for the last few days. He was running low on the cryo-rounds that his launcher used. He'd been using them to put out fires in hard to reach places.

But he was also dog tired.

"And the werewolf ca-" **ZZZT!** "Turned into some kind of moon-" **KZZT!** "ed Rampage monster?" Krick asked with a look of confusion. "And th**at** **C**aused our current-" his lips continued moving without audio for a moment. Vickers reached forward and smacked the terminal. "issues?"

"Well, I don't know about that sir." Vickers responded. "What I can tell you is that there was an absolutely INSANE amount of magical energy flowing through the area. And that for roughly a minute, time seemed to stop as this 'Moon Goddess' spoke to everyone in the city." He took a long drink of water from the pitcher that had been set in the room, forgoing the glasses next to it. "Even as someone NOT magically inclined." *At least not yet.* He thought. "I could feel the energy flowing around and.... I don't know, THROUGH?... Everything. And the pause in time was... well, pardon the french sir, but it felt fucky as shit."

Vickers watched as the General listened to someone on the other side for a moment. Then he turned back.

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"Leave." He said simply.

Werner scoffed. "Who do you think you're talking-"

"Werner! Out!" The general interrupted.

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Vickers bit his lip for just a moment as he considered the question.

"Rough." He said at last. "He uh... He got hurt pretty badly. Body and heart."

"What happened?"

"That last attack. The one where he shot through it and into the ground?" Vickers began. "Well, according to.... well, just about everyone really. He shouldn't have survived it. Call it dumb luck. Call it good instincts on the kid's part. Call it whatever you want. He only survived that one through pure bullshit luck. Bad screenwriting, plot hole, type shit."

"Really?" The General asked.

"Yeah. I was on the verge of skull dragging him back to the castle. But I think his fiance woulda fought me for that right." He looked back, as if double checking that Werner was gone. "Then I saw how bad he got fucked up."

General Krick stood up straighter. "How bad?"

"No hair. Most of his skin looking like overcooked pork rinds." Vickers tilted his head for a bit. "Left hand missing."

Krick's eyes pressed shut as his hands pressed to his face.

"Then." Vickers continued. "A few hours later the werewolf's husband comes running over to us shouting about how he needs help getting Choi back here to the castle. This was after he'd gone off to um... well... put down the wolf."

"He killed Swiftrunner?" Krick asked in surprise.

Vickers nodded solemly. "More of a... mercy killing. At least according to what the husband said." He paused for a second. "I think that's his story to tell you though. Either way then the wolf's husband kept going on about Choi's hand, and how he'd passed out, and we needed to come get him and bring him here."

"What happened?"

"Well sir." Vickers said with a shrug. "Let's just say that you're not going to need to send over a Reg-Tek pod just yet."

"Wait. What?" Krick asked, confused.

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He saw people, including some that he knew, but he didn't talk to them. They greeted him kindly, and some even touched him on the shoulder as he

passed close. But he didn't acknowledge them with anything more than a nod.

They all knew what had happened.

They all knew what the line of werewolves and the large, clothe wrapped, body meant.

And they could all tell that he didn't want to talk.

It had been a long few days as he and Amina had helped the other werewolves prepare her body for its trip west. As he'd lead the other wolves in prayers and howls while they'd anointed her in the traditional tinctures and laden her with flowers and herbs before wrapping her in canvas and silver-laced rope, which had to be handled with care by everyone except him.

The burns the rope had left on his hands were his to wear for the rest of his life. They ached even now.

But he didn't notice that.

He had deeper pains.

Amina had stayed behind. Promising to oversee the loading of the wagon train that Kela was being loaded into for the trip. Jurl had known that she'd simply wanted to stand guard over her friend, and had left her to it.

Besides. Now he had to do the most important, and most difficult, job.

A job that Amina couldn't help with.

A job that nobody could help with except Kela herself.

And even then, only by magically coming back to life and making it irrelevant.

He dreaded it with every step that took him closer to the castle.

Finally, after several hours of slowly walking through what was left of the city.

After walking through the gates to the castle.

Past the guards, one of whom was a werewolf, who simply nodded to him, with pity.

Jurl found himself at that familiar door. The one he'd walked through hundreds of times before to visit his mate on days when she didn't have time to come home.

Or when her howl home had told him that she'd been having a bad day and he'd figured that a surprise visit from the pups would cheer her up.

His hands froze as he reached for the door handle. He was shaking.

But no tears came.

It was like his body knew somehow that he would need to save them for later.

After a few moments of bracing himself he quietly turned and pulled at the door.

For a moment he thought Kela had beat him back to the castle somehow, and was waiting to surprise him.

But it was just one of her suits of armor, standing on its rack inside her foyer. She'd always liked keeping them there in case she needed to respond to an emergency.

He ran his hand over the breastplate gently, feeling the custom made curve that was so reminiscent of the ones that it had protected beneath.

"That's a cruel prank dear." He said softly. "Leaving these here to startle me like that."

Then he continued past the racks of different armors and gently opened the door to the main room.

To her room.

Tioni was sitting in the chair next to the dining table, sipping a cup of tea that smelled of citrus and vanilla. She startled when she saw him. Then she jumped up and came over.

But he was looking at his two pups, sleeping curled up in the bed nearby. They were so small compared to the massive blankets and pillows that had been made for a seven foot tall werewolf.

Mela was emitting a small, whistling, snore that sounded so painfully familiar.

"They fell asleep about an hour ago." Tioni whispered as she got close. She took Jurl's hand in hers, surprising him a little. "Tannar and I will be here in the castle until we figure something out. If you need anything, let us know. I'll babysit any time you need."

Jurl smiled weakly. "Thank you." He said softly. "Once everything settles down my crew and I, whoever is left, will help you two rebuild."

"You don't have to do that." She replied. "You don't owe us anything."

Jurl nodded as he gently pulled his hand back. "It's what she'd want to do." He said simply. "Thank you. Tell Tannar I said hello."

Tioni got the message and quickly retreated out the door.

Jurl sat down on the edge of the bed and looked down at his two children.

He could see and, in Mela's case, hear so much of their mother.

He poked her little nose lightly, causing the snore to skip a little bit. He chuckled at the funny noise as she stretched out her arms and legs, then rolled over and curled back up into a ball.

He moved over to the chair that Tioni had just vacated and took a sip of the, slightly over sweetened, tea that she'd left behind. Then he took a deep breath and put his head in his hands.

He'd tell the pups in the morning.

For now they could sleep.

Just like his body somehow knew that he needed to save his tears. He knew that they would need all the energy they could get before he explained what had happened.

Gods damn you and your selfish heroism. He thought as he looked over at the painting of him and Kela embracing each other that was on her dresser. *How could you do this to us? To ME?*

And he immediately hated that he'd even thought it.

He was going to have a long, sleepless night.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vumdhj/wait_is_this_just_gate_183/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (182/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vswjlv/wait_is_this_just_gate_181/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: [*Gird your loins*](https://qph.cf2.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-e1b184dfe66f705d300959d30c3bc754-lq) *for the last section.*

Enjoy.

\~

James stared at the new hand as he sat in the bed in his and Amina's room. He curled the long, claw tipped, fingers before extending them back out.

It wasn't Kela's hand. The fur was just a touch too dark for that. Plus Kela's hand was, at least presumably, still part of her. It was hard to tell since she wasn't in her normal form anymore, and never would be again.

He traced the muscles and veins that ran down the new appendage with his fingers. The fur ended about halfway up his forearm. Right where the burns had gone down past skin, and began taking muscle and cracking bone.

It didn't hurt. Not physically anyways. If anything his new arm felt better than any other part of him did. The rest of his body was swathed in glowing green bandages, most of which were soaked in different salves and ointments. Several even had the first signs of the dragon scales that came from the ointment Veliry had learned to make while in the Den months before.

But no. The physical pain wasn't what was keeping James from sleeping, which his body begged for.

It was the pain in his chest. That deep, nagging, ache that came with guilt and sorrow.

It didn't help that he'd been alone for the past three days.

He'd passed out only a few minutes after time had resumed. His exhaustion, the pain of what the goddess had done to his arm, the pain of all his other injuries, had caught up to him as he'd lingered there, vomiting and struggling to breath.

He'd woken up the next day as a healer had been helping Veliry put the finishing touches on changing his bandages. Jurl, Vickers, King Farrick, and most importantly Amina, hadn't been there.

Veliry had mostly wanted to question him about the hand. He'd told her everything. How he'd killed Kela. How time had stopped and the goddess had harassed him. The fiery, yet cold, excruciating pain right before time resumed. How he'd reflexively caught himself as he fell to the ground and had done so with a new, werewolf, claw at the end of his arm.

She hadn't comforted him. She hadn't tried to console him about what had happened. She'd simply written notes in a journal.

He'd had to pry information out of her in return.

That was how he'd found out that everyone else was helping out with the relief efforts. They were out putting out fires that were still out of control. They were helping get people out of collapsed buildings. They were tending to the wounded, or marshaling relief forces, or handing out food and blankets.

They were out doing all the things that James felt obligated to do.

Except Amina, who was leading a small team of werewolves in a ceremony to honor Kela's body, and transport it to a place called the Lunar Valley somewhere off to the west. Apparently as a champion of the goddess she'd earned a special form of internment in what was effectively the werewolf equivalent to Jerusalem, or Mecca or something. Between her size, and the ceremonial preparation that had to be done, it was a team effort.

According to Veliry, James would have normally been the one overseeing it, as Kela's pack leader prior to her transformation. But due to his injuries Amina, who was his fiance, and also Kela's former pack leader, was accepted as a stand in.

As if James didn't feel guilty enough already.

What was worse was the fact that; as bad as he felt about everything, he KNEW that Amina was in a worse place than him.

Mainly because he hadn't seen her for even a second since he'd woken up.

And he knew she was hurting.

James looked at the hand, so similar to Kela's. Yet just different enough.

He had a feeling that the Goddess's "boon" was going to haunt both him AND Amina.

He laid back in the bed and reached for the small bottle of sleeping aide that the healer had left him, ensuring him that sleep would be better for the healing process.

His new hand reached it easily.

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"So you're telling me-" **KZZZT!** "oi dove into a giant-" **KXZT!** "monster the size of a damn sky scraper? And he li-" **BVVVVT!** General Krick asked as his signal cut in and out with interference.

"Yes sir." Vickers responded simply. He was still coated in ash and soot from the recovery efforts that he'd been taking part in for the last few days. He was running low on the cryo-rounds that his launcher used. He'd been using them to put out fires in hard to reach places.

But he was also dog tired.

"And the werewolf ca-" **ZZZT!** "Turned into some kind of moon-" **KZZT!** "ed Rampage monster?" Krick asked with a look of confusion. "And th**at** **C**a^(used) our current-" his lips continued moving without audio for a moment. Vickers reached forward and smacked the terminal. "issues?"

"Well, I don't know about that sir." Vickers responded. "What I can tell you is that there was an absolutely INSANE amount of magical energy flowing through the area. And that for roughly a minute, time seemed to stop as this 'Moon Goddess' spoke to everyone in the city." He took a long drink of water from the pitcher that had been set in the room, forgoing the glasses next to it. "Even as someone NOT magically inclined." *At least not yet.* He thought. "I could feel the energy flowing around and.... I don't know, THROUGH?... Everything. And the

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vumccw/wait_is_this_just_gate_183/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (181/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vs43cn/wait_is_this_just_gate_180/)

Writer's note: Writing for gods is interesting. Also, James gets an anime-style upgrade.

Enjoy.

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"You know, I don't think I remember an occasion where one of my champions LET themselves be killed." The formless voice said, seeming to move from one of James's ears to the other.

Moon Goddess? He tried to say. But his mouth didn't move. None of him could.

"That's me." The voice said.

You did this to her. He.... said(?) in response.

"Did I?" The voice asked in a mock-playful tone. "Strange. God or not I don't remember placing one of my tears in her mouth and smashing her jaw shut over it." The being chuckled, and the 'noise' made James's head hurt. "In fact, I wasn't even in this realm when she manifested that form. That's why there was a bit of delay before I made my judgment."

Put her back! James replied.

The voice Tssk'ed at James.

"No can do." It said, pretending to be upset at the idea. "The Kela you knew... and had come to love... is gone. It's the price of the power." They said. "Ten to thirty minutes of gargantuan size, speed, strength, and durability.... and the source of power it uses is the person's soul."

That's bullshit! He spat back, though his mouth still didn't move.

"No. That's the price of using a god-made artifact. And those tears aren't the only ones out there. They're just, and pardon if I'm a bit biased, the best of them."

You're a god. You clearly have control over time. And this world. PUT. HER. BACK.

James suddenly felt a warm, soothing sensation. As though someone was caressing his cheek.

"Jamesy, Jamesy, Jamesy." It said mockingly. James felt a light slap on his cheek. Despite his burned face, it actually didn't hurt. "If I started doing that then all the other rules of this world would be brought into question. So, sadly, no deal."

If you can't help then why are you here?

"Well. I'm HERE... because a champion was manifested." The voice shifted over closer to Kela's body, though James still didn't see anything. "It's been.... What?... Two Millennia since that's happened." The voice changed location again. "And I was bored. So... Here I am. It was quite a spectacular fight." James felt a hand on his shoulder. "You.... were most fascinating."

GLAD... I could entertain. James hoped that his sarcasm came through in whatever manner he was communicating with the supposed God.

"Oh you definitely did. I mean... a stock standard human, albeit one from a different universe, diving directly into a three hundred foot tall flame elemental?" To James's surprise he felt a something pat at his groin. He felt violated. "If I didn't know any better I'd have thought you were Penteros." The phantom hand trailed up and rested on his chest. "But that little fool of a demigod has been dead for a long time."

The hand on left his chest, and the voice moved away.

"Still though." It continued. "This... Kela Swiftrunner... Hell of a champion. To maintain THAT level of control, even after that fight and all that time." James saw some of Kela's fur move a bit, as if a hand was running through it. "Most impressive... Enough control to hold off her desire to kill and eat everyone around her." The fur stopped moving and the voice came closer. "The pups I understood. I mean, I am a mother, after all. But to hold back even when it was just you and those other two? And to lay down and act like a bloody lap dog even as you sliced her neck open?" The voice chuckled again. "Well now, that's just unheard of."

It's because she was a good person! James tried to yell.

"Yes. I know. But it's still impressive. I can't recall a champion EVER having that much autonomy once the power had devoured them." James felt

the hand again. In fact he felt both hands. Resting on his shoulders. "She'll have a place of honor in this world's afterlife. One of luxury and comfort. Even other champions won't linger in as fine of an afterlife as she. She's earned it."

That... didn't make James feel better.

"You though?" The voice continued. "You have captured my eye... young human. And your world, which is somehow still attached to this one. Well, I paid them a visit. They're one of our test worlds. Your history there is most interesting." The hands lifted, and James felt an elbow rest on his left shoulder. As if the god was leaning on him. "I'm going to have to go back there and take a closer look. I'm sure the other gods will be most interested in its progress."

And THAT reminded James of the real threat to this world.

Speaking of "other gods". James wondered.

The voice chuckled. "Now now James. You've impressed me." He felt the remaining hand move down his chest again.

Then he felt a piercing pain in his chest. As though someone had plunged an icicle into his sternum and pierced his heart.

He wanted to scream. But his body was still locked in place.

The voice grew harsh.... and angry. "But don't think I'll let slip any spoilers."

Suddenly, the iciness in his chest stopped. James would have collapsed if he could have.

"Now. Like I said, you've impressed me." The voice continued, once again calm and almost playful. "But you've also killed my champion. So I'm going to give you a boon James Choi. But it's also going to be an eternal reminder of what has happened here. Good AND bad in the same gift."

Consider me honored. James said, now angry.

"As you should be. Plus it should save you some time and pain."

What? *What is it?"* He asked.

"Well. You know that left hand of yours? Or rather, what's left of it." The voice asked, with a hint of mocking.

Up until that point James had been making a point of NOT trying to think about his left hand. The arm was tourniquet-ed just above the elbow, and the scorched stub had been coated in a poultice that one of the druids had put on it for the pain before they'd wrapped it in the green bandages. Despite that, it still hurt more than any other injury he'd ever gotten in his entire life.

But there'd been no denying the charred stub that ended just above the wrist.

It had been holding the side of the lance, trying to keep it pointed straight, as he'd blasted his way into the elemental. As a result it hadn't been protected by the lance's built in hand shield.

He hadn't known how they would deal with it. Even Veliry had been doubtful that it would be something they could heal. In fact they didn't know how much of his damage would be healable by anything other than salves, ointments, and time. Elemental fire was just different like that.

What are you talking about? He asked.

The goddess chuckled again. James's head felt like it was going to split.

"Just this."

James's arm burned worse than even what the pain of its injury had caused him.

His frozen status was the only reason he didn't scream until he passed out.

"Good luck James. Odds are against you. Make a good show of it." The voice said right as the pain shut off.

Then time resumed.

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James immediately collapsed to the ground.

Amina didn't notice at first. She was still sobbing into the now cooling fur of Kela's face.

But Jurl saw it happen.

"James!" He blurted out in surprise as James fell to his knees.

And caught himself with his hands.

Both hands.

Jurl tried to help James up, but jumped back as James's left hand grasped his arm for support.

"What in the hells?" He asked.

The rest of his body still ached and cried out in pain from his burns, bruises, and broken bones.

But his WHOLE left arm felt as good as if nothing had happened.

James peered at the new hand.

He stared at the dark brown, almost black, fur that coated it.

The elongated fingers that ended in long, dark, sharp, fingernails.

No. He thought. *Those are claws.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vtp8im/wait_is_this_just_gate_182/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (181/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vs41f2/wait_is_this_just_gate180/) /
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"You know, I don't think I remember an occasion where one of my champions LET themselves be killed." The formless voice said, seeming to move from one of James's ears to the other.

Moon Goddess? He tried to say. But his mouth didn't move. None of him could.

"That's me." The voice said.

You did this to her. He.... said(?) in response.

"Did I?" The voice asked in a mock-playful tone. "Strange. God or not I don't remember placing one of my tears in her mouth and smashing her jaw shut over it." The being chuckled, and the 'noise' made James's head hurt. "In fact, I wasn't even in this realm when she manifested that form. That's why there was a bit of delay before I made my judgment."

Put her back! James replied.

The voice Tssk'ed at James.

"No can do." It said, pretending to be upset at the idea. "The Kela you knew... and had come to love... is gone. It's the price of the power." They said. "Ten to thirty minutes of gargantuan size, speed, strength, and durability.... and the source of power it uses is the person's soul."

That's bullshit! He spat back, though his mouth still didn't move.

"No. That's the price of using a god-made artifact. And those tears aren't the only ones out there. They're just, and pardon if I'm a bit biased, the best of them."

You're a god. You clearly have control over time. And this world. PUT. HER. BACK.

James suddenly felt a warm, soothing sensation. As though someone was caressing his cheek.

"Jamesy, Jamesy, Jamesy." It said mockingly. James felt a light slap on his cheek. Despite his burned face, it actually didn't hurt. "If I started doing that then all the other rules of this world would be brought into question. So, sadly, no deal."

If you can't help then why are you here?

"Well. I'm HERE... because a champion was manifested." The voice shifted over closer to Kela's body, though James still didn't see anything. "It's been.... What?... Two Millennia since that's happened." The voice changed location again. "And I was bored. So... Here I am. It was quite a spectacular fight." James felt a hand on his shoulder. "You.... were most fascinating."

GLAD... I could entertain. James hoped that his sarcasm came through in whatever manner he was communicating with the supposed God.

"Oh you definitely did. I mean... a stock standard human, albeit one from a different universe, diving directly into a three hundred foot tall flame elemental?" To James's surprise he felt a something pat at his groin. He felt violated. "If I didn't know any better I'd have thought you were Penteros." The phantom hand trailed up and rested on his chest. "But that little fool of a demigod has been dead for a long time."

The hand on left his chest, and the voice moved away.

"Still though." It continued. "This... Kela Swiftrunner... Hell of a champion. To maintain THAT level of control, even after that fight and all that time." James saw some of Kela's fur move a bit, as if a hand was running through it. "Most impressive... Enough control to hold off her desire to kill and eat everyone around her." The fur stopped moving and the voice came closer. "The pups I understood. I mean, I am a mother, after all. But to hold back even when it was just you and those other two? And to lay down and act like a bloody lap dog even as you sliced her neck open?" The voice chuckled again. "Well now, that's just unheard of."

It's because she was a good person! James tried to yell.

"Yes. I know. But it's still impressive. I can't recall a champion EVER having that much autonomy once the power had devoured them." James felt the hand again. In fact he felt both hands. Resting on his shoulders. "She'll have a place of honor in this world's afterlife. One of luxury

and comfort. Even other champions won't linger in as fine of an afterlife as she. She's earned it."

That... didn't make James feel better.

"You though?" The voice continued. "You have captured my eye... young human. And your world, which is somehow still attached to this one. Well, I paid them a visit. They're one of our test worlds. Your history there is most interesting." The hands lifted, and James felt an elbow rest on his left shoulder. As if the god was leaning on him. "I'm going to have to go back there and take a closer look. I'm sure the other gods will be most interested in its progress."

And THAT reminded James of the real threat to this world.

Speaking of "other gods". James wondered.

The voice chuckled. "Now now James. You've impressed me." He felt the remaining hand move down his chest again.

Then he felt a piercing pain in his chest. As though someone had plunged an icicle into his sternum and pierced his heart.

He wanted to scream. But his body was still locked in place.

The voice grew harsh.... and angry. "But don't think I'll let slip any spoilers."

Suddenly, the iciness in his chest stopped. James would have collapsed if he could have.

"Now. Like I said, you've impressed me." The voice continued, once again calm and almost playful. "But you've also killed my champion. So I'm going to give you a boon James Choi. But it's also going to be an eternal reminder of what has happened here. Good AND bad in the same gift."

Consider me honored. James said, now angry.

"As you should be. Plus it should save you some time and pain."

What? *What is it?"* He asked.

"Well. You know that left hand of yours? Or rather, what's left of it." The voice asked, with a hint of mocking.

Up until that point James had been making a point of NOT trying to think about his left hand. The arm was tourniquet-ed just above the elbow, and the scorched stub had been coated in a poultice that one of the druids had put on it for the pain before they'd wrapped it in the green bandages. Despite that, it still hurt more than any other injury he'd ever gotten in his entire life.

But there'd been no denying the charred stub that ended just above the wrist.

It had been holding the side of the lance, trying to keep it pointed straight, as he'd blasted his way into the elemental. As a result it hadn't been protected by the lance's built in hand shield.

He hadn't known how they would deal with it. Even Veliry had been doubtful that it would be something they could heal. In fact they didn't know how much of his damage would be healable by anything other than salves, ointments, and time. Elemental fire was just different like that.

What are you talking about? He asked.

The goddess chuckled again. James's head felt like it was going to split.

"Just this."

James's arm burned worse than even what the pain of its injury had caused him.

His frozen status was the only reason he didn't scream until he passed out.

"Good luck James. Odds are against you. Make a good show of it." The voice said right as the pain shut off.

Then time resumed.

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James immediately collapsed to the ground.

Amina didn't notice at first. She was still sobbing into the now cooling fur of Kela's face.

But Jurl saw it happen.

"James!" He blurted out in surprise as James fell to his knees.

And caught himself with his hands.

Both hands.

Jurl tried to help James up, but jumped back as James's left hand grasped his arm for support.

"What in the hells?" He asked.

The rest of his body still ached and cried out in pain from his burns, bruises, and broken bones.

But his WHOLE left arm felt as good as if nothing had happened.

James peered at the new hand.

He stared at the dark brown, almost black, fur that coated it.

The elongated fingers that ended in long, dark, sharp, fingernails.

No. He thought. *Those are claws.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vtp793/wait_is_this_just_gate_182/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (180/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/voum5b/wait_is_this_just_gate_179/)

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Enjoy(?)

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"Wh-.... where is she?" James asked as King Farrick, Vickers, and several other people helped extricate him from the still hot ground. Veliry and several of the mages had widened the hole he'd created with their own magic. Amina was there to hold him steady and comfort him as they lowered him down in front of her, onto the cloak she'd taken off.

The damage was.... bad. The only reason James wasn't unconscious or delirious with pain was likely because he was in shock. Though, James had a feeling that part of the problem was that some of his nerves had been completely scorched.

But that was a problem for later.

"She ran off after she got out of the pit." Vickers replied as Amina cradled his head.

"Don't worry about that now." Amina added. "We need to get you to the healers.

"No." James responded before shivering violently. "No. I have to see her. I... I remembered-" He was interrupted by another shiver.

"Remembered? Remembered what?" Amina asked.

"I... I remembered the-" Another shiver. "the first order I ever gave her." He gripped Amina's arm with his right hand. "Just... help me get to her. We'll go to the healers after."

"James... No." Amina replied.

"Choi... Dude.... No." Vickers added. "We gotta get you un-fucked guy."

James gripped harder on Amina's arm. He winced from the pain of his own broken arm. "Please." He begged.

She looked him in the eyes and saw the determination there.

"Fine." She said after a few moments. "But first we get you healed. Even if its just a little bit. And we take it slow."

James nodded slightly before shivering again.

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Jurl was waiting for them when they finally got to where Kela was.

Amina had correctly theorized that she'd gone to check on Jurl and the children, and they'd found her massive paw prints leading away from the house and towards the creek only a few minutes away.

The found Jurl kneeling on the ground some twenty yards or so away as the massive wolf champion calmly lapped at the gently flowing, slightly ashy, water of the creek.

Amina gently lowered James next to him.

"Jurl." She said softly as she placed a hand on his shoulder.

Jurl didn't look at her. He wiped tears from his eyes before speaking.

"She's-" He began before lightly shaking his head. "She.. did it... She upheld the promise she made the first time she ever held the pups."

"Jurl, where are the children?" Amina asked.

He looked towards her with a pained smile. "They're on their way to the castle with one of our neighbors. She's one of the servants there. She's taking them to Kela's room." He shook his head again. "I didn't want them to be here for this. Plus it's not safe here. Not yet."

"Be here for what?" She followed up.

Jurl looked at James's burned, barely conscious form. James nodded as he looked back.

"She's waiting." Jurl said, not answering her question. "She's.... holding on... barely. But she's also in pain... and scared."

"Jurl, what are you talking about?" Amina asked, suddenly sounding concerned.

"The first, and really ONLY, order that James ever gave her as her pack leader." Jurl answered.

Amina looked at James curiously.

"Amina." James said gently. "You should head back. Jurl can help me get back if that's what it takes."

"James what are you talking about?" She asked. Now the concern was more evident.

"He's here to kill her." Jurl said.

Amina looked at Jurl in shock and saw a small dagger in his hand. He was holding it very carefully by its leather wrapped handle.

She could tell by the color that it was a silver blade.

"No." She said as she looked back at James, shaking her head. "James no."

James looked at her with sorrow in his eyes.

Amina was about to speak when Jurl spoke up again.

"She's gone Amina." He said simply. He lowered his head with his eyes closed. "I've known it since the moment the Goddess spoke to all of us." He took a deep breath. "She's not Kela anymore. Not really. I... I understand her. Kind of. The whimpers. The howls. The yips. It's.... It's more primal. But as a born werewolf I can understand bits and pieces." He shook his head a bit. "She's gone Amina. It's just pain, fear, and a slowly ebbing fight against her instincts."

"We can get her back." Amina countered. "There has to be a way."

Jurl looked toward her again. "You know that's not true." He said. "It was a tear of the moon goddess. Unless you're a god. There's no undoing it."

Amina wanted to respond. To have some answer to the contrary.

But she knew he was right.

"You don't need to stay here for this." James said from where he was sitting. "I can do this." He looked over at the massive glowing wolf that had once been Kela. "I... owe it to her." Kela looked over at them and tilted her head to the side.

Amina tried to understand.

They'd won.

Kela had won.

James had won.

THEY HAD WON.

So why did they have to lose Kela?

The General and Princess in her understood. People had already died in this battle. Hundreds, maybe even thousands had been killed just by the Elemental's emergence. And more had continued to die during the battle. Hells, more would likely die from the flames and smoke before they got the damage under control.

But Kela was her best friend in the entire world. Even James, her lover and fiance, didn't know her as well as Kela did.

"No." She said before she even realized she was speaking. She lowered as her hands dug into the leather padding on her legs. "No... I'll... I'll help.... I should be there."

Jurl's furred hand rested on top of hers and gripped it.

"I think." he began. "I think she'd like that.... to have you there."

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Kela was sitting calmly when they finally made their way to her. In fact, if it hadn't been for her monstrous size, and the fact that her eyes, mouth, and paws were still glowing with the ethereal lunar light, he might have mistaken her for a normal dog.

She growled a bit at first, her ears lowering to her head a bit as her fur puffed up slightly.

Jurl sped up and approached her first. Kela sniffed him curiously before licking his face with her massive tongue. James and Amina looked on curiously from where she was holding him up gently.

Jurl wrapped his arms around Kela's snout as she leaned into him.

"My love." He said gently, barely audible over the gentle rumble of Kela's breathing and the noise of the creek nearby. "James and Amina are here. You know them. They're here to help."

Suddenly Kela's ears raised back up and her massive tail began to thump at the ground as it began to wag.

Jurl gestured with one hand as he continued to rub his face against Kela's.

"It's okay." he said. "She's not going to hurt you. She's just... I don't think she remembers things well now."

James looked up at Amina and saw the tears rolling down her cheek.

"Come on." He said softly. "Let's get you over there so you can talk to her." He gave her opposite shoulder a light squeeze with the hand that was resting on it. That arm, though partially healed, still ached with pain. Most of his body did.

"Okay." She said weakly before stepping forward.

James was surprised at how hot Kela was once he was up close. He supposed it made sense. She was a massive, building sized, mammal. Her metabolism in this form had to be insane. But even still, she was almost as hot as Steve would get when he was about to breath fire.

And that said nothing of the intense magical energy he could feel emanating off of her in waves. He was vaguely reminded of the few times he'd been near certain generators and transformers and had sworn that he could feel the electricity in the air. Only this was magic that he was feeling.

She sniffed Amina deeply for several seconds. Then, just like Jurl, ran her long glowing tongue up Amina's whole front side, leaving a glowing trail of saliva sticking to her. Then Kela pressed her snout into Amina's side.

That was the last thing Amina could handle.

She wrapped her arms around the gargantuan snout as she sank to her knees crying.

Kela did what James had seen so many dogs do for the people they liked when they were sad or hurt, and laid her head on top of Amina, forcing her onto her butt in the process, then she began to whimper softly.

James, now standing on his own, looked over to Jurl. Jurl just nodded solemnly.

James limped his way over to the side of Kela's neck, pulling the silver dagger from his belt as he did.

Her neck was nearly twenty feet long on its own, and even with her head effectively resting on the ground right now, it was still significantly taller than him. He ran his fingers along the side of it as he slowly walked back along it.

He didn't want anyone to see or hear this. Least of all Amina.

"I was never supposed to be here." He said softly as he looked back at his fiance as she sobbed into the fur of her former friend.

He noticed Kela's massive ear twitch, facing towards him, as he spoke.

"Not me or Sarge." He continued. "Then you killed him because of some stupid fucking instinctual reaction smelling cancer on him." His knuckles creaked a bit as his grip on the dagger tightened. "And I fucking hated you. I wanted SO BADLY to kill you for it. For killing him. For kidnapping me. For just... everything."

He stopped walking as he got near her shoulder. As he did he leaned toward her a bit and began feeling her neck with the hand holding the dagger. He had to dig through the thick, and startlingly soft, fur that hung off her shaggily.

"I thought... with good reason mind, mind you... that you were all my enemies. But you were number one on the list of people I wanted to get back at."

He thought he felt what he was looking for, and dug a bit deeper into the fur. He was surprised to find that the skin underneath glowed too.

After a few moments of feeling around he felt it. That slow, steady, and incredibly powerful feeling, pulse of an artery.

"But somewhere along the line I started to..." He paused and took a deep breath as his own tears started to come now. "Somewhere along the line I stopped hating you. Maybe because we were roommates. Maybe because you helped save my ass a few times." He shook his head as he wiped his cheek. "At some point you stopped being an enemy and started-" He shuddered, shivering and struggling to breath at the same time. "You started being my friend."

James took a step back and looked away for a second.

"I think you became my best friend here." He finally admitted to himself. "Other than Amina.... But that's different." He wiped a bit of snot from his soot stained nose. "You taught me about this world. About the people and culture."

He looked back towards where he knew Amina was. He could still hear her crying.

"And as fucked up as it is. If it hadn't been for you that day." He shook his head again. "For what you did.... and how i reacted." He closed his eyes as he finally admitted something he'd known for a long time now. "I wouldn't be where I'm at now. Good or bad."

James reached back forward and found the spot on her neck again.

"Thank you Kela." He said. "I know I said I'd never forgive you for what you did." His hand finally felt the pulse again. "But... Well... I don't think I have a say in it now."

James turned his hand so that the dagger's tip was resting against the artery. It sizzled and let off a bad smell as several strands of her fur touched it and immediately burned off.

He wanted to say more. But he didn't think anything else would fit. Besides, what more was there to say? He had a feeling that if any part of her was still listening, it probably knew what he was thinking.

What he was feeling.

Before he could overthink, James pressed the blade in up to its hand-guard.

Kela stiffened and Amina let out a noise of surprise as the massive wolf head lifted off of the ground. The motion caused the dagger to pull out of her neck, and James felt several drops of blood hit his hand. It was like someone had spilled hot coffee onto his hand, and his burns only made it hurt worse.

The noise Amina made caused Kela to look down at her and Jurl. She seemed to consider them for a moment. Then she lowered her head gently between the both of them. They embraced her again as she did, and James felt her tail begin to wag again.

The silver of the blade had done its job, he saw, and the wound didn't seal shut like all the damage from the elemental had before.

He plunged it back in gently and widened the wound a bit.

He wanted this to be quick, and as close to painless as it could be.

This time she didn't react.

James leaned into her fur as he began to cry in earnest.

"Thank you." He repeated.

He didn't know what to expect to happen as Kela passed away.

She didn't shrink back to her original size.

She didn't fade away, or turn to dust, or anything cinematic like that.

The only noticeable difference he could see was that the parts of her body that had been glowing, slowly began to dim.

After several minutes they'd faded back to their normal color.

James felt as the pulse beneath his head slowed.

And slowed.

And eventually stopped all together.

The rumble of her breathing followed suit.

The dagger dropped out of his hand and clattered against the ashy ground.

And she was well and truly gone. Not just in mind, but in body as well.

After several minutes of lingering like this James pulled himself up, using his good arm to hold onto Kela's fur as he stood. It hurt so bad.

He turned, and was about to go to Amina, when the world froze.

A startlingly deep, yet still recognizably feminine, voice spoke to him.

"James Choi.... The summoned hero." It said from what seemed to be just out of his view. "Hmmm. You are most interesting indeed."

James's eyes widened as he realized who was talking to him.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vswkvu/wait_is_this_just_gate_181/)

Wait, is this just GATE?(180/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/voukwf/wait_is_this_just_gate_179/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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"I thought... with good reason, mind you... that you were all my enemies. But you were number one on the list of people I wanted to get back at."

He thought he felt what he was looking for, and dug a bit deeper into the fur. He was surprised to find that the skin underneath glowed too.

After a few moments of feeling around he felt it. That slow, steady, and incredibly powerful feeling, pulse of an artery.

"But somewhere along the line I started to..." He paused and took a deep breath as his own tears started to come now. "Somewhere along the line I stopped hating you. Maybe because we were roommates. Maybe because you helped save my ass a few times." He shook his head as he wiped his cheek. "At some point you stopped being an enemy and started-" He shuddered, shivering and struggling to breath at the same time. "You started being my friend."

James took a step back and looked away for a second.

"I think you became my best friend here." He finally admitted to himself. "Other than Amina.... But that's different." He wiped a bit of snot from his soot stained nose. "You taught me about this world. About the people and culture."

He looked back towards where he knew Amina was. He could still hear her crying.

"And as fucked up as it is. If it hadn't been for you that day." He shook his head again. "For what you did.... and how i reacted." He closed his eyes as he finally admitted something he'd known for a long time now. "I wouldn't be where I'm at now. Good or bad."

James reached back forward and found the spot on her neck again.

"Thank you Kela." He said. "I know I said I'd never forgive you for what you did." His hand finally felt the pulse again. "But... Well... I don't think I have a say in it now."

James turned his hand so that the dagger's tip was resting against the artery. It sizzled and let off a bad smell as several strands of her fur touched it and immediately burned off.

He wanted to say more. But he didn't think anything else would fit. Besides, what more was there to say? He had a feeling that if any part of her was still listening, it probably knew what he was thinking.

What he was feeling.

Before he could overthink, James pressed the blade in up to its hand-guard.

Kela stiffened and Amina let out a noise of surprise as the massive wolf head lifted off of the ground. The motion caused the dagger to pull out

of her neck, and James felt several drops of blood hit his hand. It was like someone had spilled hot coffee onto his hand, and his burns only made it hurt worse.

The noise Amina made caused Kela to look down at her and Jurl. She seemed to consider them for a moment. Then she lowered her head gently between the both of them. They embraced her again as she did, and James felt her tail begin to wag again.

The silver of the blade had done its job, he saw, and the wound didn't seal shut like all the damage from the elemental had before.

He plunged it back in gently and widened the wound a bit.

He wanted this to be quick, and as close to painless as it could be.

This time she didn't react.

James leaned into her fur as he began to cry in earnest.

"Thank you." He repeated.

He didn't know what to expect to happen as Kela passed away.

She didn't shrink back to her original size.

She didn't fade away, or turn to dust, or anything cinematic like that.

The only noticeable difference he could see was that the parts of her body that had been glowing, slowly began to dim.

After several minutes they'd faded back to their normal color.

James felt as the pulse beneath his head slowed.

And slowed.

And eventually stopped all together.

The rumble of her breathing followed suit.

The dagger dropped out of his hand and clattered against the ashy ground.

And she was well and truly gone. Not just in mind, but in body as well.

After several minutes of lingering like this James pulled himself up, using his good arm to hold onto Kela's fur as he stood. It hurt so bad.

He turned, and was about to go to Amina, when the world froze.

A startlingly deep, yet still recognizably feminine, voice spoke to him.

"James Choi.... The summoned hero." It said from what seemed to be just out of his view. "Hmmm. You are most interesting indeed."

James's eyes widened as he realized who was talking to him.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vswjlv/wait_is_this_just_gate_181/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (179/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vos1gr/wait_is_this_just_gate_178/)

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She ran to try to get past them. Didn't they know that James was in there? They had to stop. They had to get him out.

Just as she was on the verge of reaching the first line of casters a massive, silver-clad, form barreled into her and tackled her to the ground. She struggled to free herself from his grasp. But Vickers was larger, and now that he'd been here a while he was nearly as strong as she was.

She clawed at the ground, trying desperately to free herself.

"He's in there!" She yelled. "James is in there! We have to get him out! It'll kill him!"

"I know!" Vickers shook his head and ripped the silver hood off. "I know!" He repeated. "But we can't go in there. YOU... can't go in there!"

"We have to get him." She sobbed into the ashy dirt. "I have to yell at him for being a selfish fool."

"I know." Vickers said as he gripped her wrists and pressed her down. "Me too."

The blasts of pressure and earth were coming slower now.

"Me too." He repeated to himself as Amina shook beneath him.

The King stepped up next to him and looked Vickers in the eye. Vickers thought he looked sad. But King Farrick just nodded and turned to watch as the Elemental continued to die.

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Kela ran as fast as she could.

Despite the fact that her legs were dozens of times longer than her whole body had ever been, she felt sluggish.

She didn't have time for sluggish.

They were less than a mile away now.

And she was running out of time.

She had never known before why hunters, adventurers, and other lone wanderers had feared wolves in the wild. As a born werewolf it had never been a threat that she needed to concern herself with.

But now the idea of being alone. Of having **The Wolf** circling around her. Ready to bring her down the second she showed weakness.

It terrified her.

She had to see them.

Just one more time.

Before she lost control and couldn't protect them from even herself.

She was close now. In more ways than one.

And then she saw it... what was left of it.

And her heart, even as massive as it was now, skipped.

It was burnt and half collapsed.

No! She thought.

It was hard to think now. Even thinking the simple, single syllable, word was like pulling a ship's anchor from the bottom of the ocean.

Pups!.... Save pups.... Pups... Live... Save.

She sniffed and pawed lightly at the wreck of their home.

They were there. She could smell them. She just had to find them. But the house was so rich with their scents from years of them living there, that it was hard to pinpoint them.

There was something. Something she had to remember. Something important.

Then she smelled a sweet, tangy, smell. A smell that usually made her happy.

Wine.

Cellar.

Jurl had made a wine cellar when he'd finally opened his own carpentry shop and company.

She didn't remember it in so many words. But she remembered the dinner he'd made when he'd finally gotten the loan for it. The bottle of wine that his partner had bought for them as a celebratory gift.

Remembered the night they'd spent together after.

She moved over to where she knew the entrance was and saw the debris covering it.

She sniffed deeply.

Pups safe! She thought happily as she gently moved her massive paws in to begin digging.

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Amina didn't wait for the crater to cool.

She didn't wait for Veliry or her father or anyone else to make sure it was truly safe.

The second the top of it collapsed inward she blasted a bolt of flame out of her hand, hitting Vickers in his leg. The sudden heat and impact startled him, and the second he loosened his grip in surprise, she bucked him off of her back and clambered forward.

She scrabbled down the Elemental glass laden walls, ignoring the cuts and burns it inflicted on her hands.

She stumbled and almost faceplanted on a jagged piece of the stuff. But she caught herself with a dragon skin cloaked elbow and kept moving.

"JAMES!?!" She yelled, using her own voice of authority.

She punched a piece of the glass that jutted up out of the ground, breaking it, and lifted it. It burned at her hands, but she ignored it and tossed it aside.

There was nothing under it but more of the black, swirling glass.

No. It's obsidian. He called it obsidian.

"JAMES!" She repeated. **"WHERE ARE YOU?"**

Then she got to the base of the Elemental's now petrified body.

It's size didn't matter at all to her.

The value of it didn't matter.

And, she'd never admit it, but the amount of people it had killed, for just a moment, didn't matter.

What did matter was what she saw inside of it.

The Lance of the Lake Eater.

She slammed into the side of the superhot sculpture and pounded her fists against it.

He wasn't there.

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Jurl huddled over the children as they cowered in the dark, wine stinking, room.

He could hear and smell what was making all the noise outside the cellar door. And he knew that the kids could too.

Jurl had been scared when half the house had been blasted away from the Elemental's emergence.

He'd been scared when he'd heard the children screaming and had smelled the burns they'd taken because they'd been playing outside.

He'd rushed to get them and had felt a new fear once he'd seen what was happening.

And he thought he'd felt the worst fear when he'd heard the first of the world-shaking howls. That howl that had sounded so monstrous, and yet had been in the voice of his beloved. And then the voice of the Goddess.

The fear once he'd known. Truly known. How his world had just been changed.

But now? Huddled in this cellar that he'd once built as a gift to himself?

With the monstrous Champion clawing at the door, so stunningly gentle?

The Champion that he KNEW was his mate?

That he knew was the mother of the two pups huddled behind him in fear?

He felt a fear he couldn't quantify.

A fear, not just for his life.

But for his future.

And more importantly, for the future of those two pups.

A fear because he knew that any minute now it would uncover them.

And good or bad, he'd have to face her. Whatever it entailed.

Jurl fought not to cry. He needed to be strong.

For the pups.

And, he hated to admit, for himself.

Then the racket stopped, and he could see light shining dimly from around the edges of the door.

And heard something that broke his heart.

She was whimpering.

It was low and rumbled despite its tone.

He felt a tug at his shirt. Tilo was looking up at him.

"Dadda." He said as he looked at the door. "It's mom."

Jurl winced. "I know." He turned and looked at his two children and put on a smile. "I need you two to stay here for a moment, okay? I just have to go see if she's okay."

He gave them each a kiss on the forehead and gently pushed them back behind the crate that he'd planned on turning into a table.

"I'll be right back." He said as he stood up and approached the door.

He took a deep breath as he reached out to the handle. His hand was trembling.

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What happened? Where am I?

Everything around him was dark.

But good god. It is so cool. Wherever this is.

He tried to open his eyes. But everything remained dark.

He coughed, and suddenly smelled earth.

That's right. I was in the trap pit. I speared the Elemental.

That... should have killed him, he realized.

Wait... How am I alive?

Then the rest of it came back to him.

The memory as he screamed out Kela's name.

The heat.

The almost instinctual drawing in of energy.

Goddam, drawing in thermal energy from that fiery fuck felt GANGSTER!

Then he remembered the pain.

Everything. ABOSLUTELY EVERYTHING. Hurt. He thought even his organs probably hurt.

But his skin and his arms, hurt the worst.

He knew, without any doubt, that he was severely burned. And as he tried, unsuccessfully, to move his arms he realized that they were definitely broken.

He moved his head a bit. That hurt too. There was dirt all around his head.

Oh great. I'm buried alive. Of my top ten phobias, that's number four. He thought with a painful chuckle that got some dirt into his mouth. *Right behind burning alive. Go figure.*

He began to draw in energy. He wondered if he could use his mouth for the only solution he could think of. Because hands seemed to be off the table.

Worth trying. He thought as he exhaled.

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Mate! Kela thought as the door opened and she saw Jurl step out. But he stopped just outside of the door and tried to shut it behind him. But something resisted him. No, someone. Two someones.

Pups!... Safe!

It wasn't important enough to pay attention to, but her massive tail kicked up debris and ashes as it wagged.

"It's.... you..." He said as he knelt down and wrapped his arms around the children. He pressed them behind him.

He was hiding them.

She smelled their burns.

Pups hurt. She thought with a whine. *I help.*

She moved her head toward them, scooting forward on her front paws as she did, and nuzzled him with her gargantuan snout.

But he wouldn't move.

He was.... No... They were... scared of her.

She whined again as she pulled back, her sail-like ears drooping.

Mela peered around Jurls side and looked at her.

Jurl tried to hold her back.

"MAMA!" She yelled as she broke free from her father and ran forward to hug Kela's snout.

Kela's mouth hung open and her eyes squinted shut as her tail started wagging again.

Then Tilo was hugging her too.

Jurl stood up, staring at her. She could smell the salt of his tears and hear his heart beating rapidly.

"You're.... still in there." He said uncertainly. He stepped forward on shaking legs. "You still have control.... even a little." He said as he placed his hand on the side of her nose. "You're still their mother."

She licked her two injured pups. The saliva of her tongue coated them in a sticky, viscous, glowing mucous.

Heal pups.

And sure enough, the burns began to fade, and soft wolfen hair sprouted from the flawless skin underneath.

Jurl looked down at them in awe. And then, without even meaning to, he wrapped his arms around her snout too.

Pups safe! She thought.

And it was the last conscious, happy, thought she ever had.

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Veliry hovered just a few inches above the still hot elemental obsidian as she comforted Amina, who was still sobbing against the base of the Elemental's remains.

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Instead, he had done what he always did and had plunged headfirst into an unwinnable fight.

And as if that wasn't bad enough. The little maniac had won that fight.

But now he was gone.

We didn't even get to go on our trip. She thought, hating how selfish the thought was. *He was going to show me more recipes.*

"I wanted to know what pizza was." She said softly.

The obsidian crunched a bit behind her, and she expected her father to step up behind her and hug her.

Instead, she was shocked to hear Veliry exclaim. "How the hells?"

"We're not cooking pizza for a while." Said a familiar voice from behind, and below, her. "I think... I'm not gonna be down for any wood fires any time soon."

Amina spun on her heels. "James?" She asked as she turned.

But he wasn't there.

Nobody was.

"Pssst. Down here." He said.

Amina looked down and was surprised to see James's face, incredibly burned (even compared to before his final plunge) and covered in blisters and dirt, sticking out of the ground.

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"Tadaa." He said weakly. He took a deep breath. "Okay. That loses a bit of its comedic effect when you can't do jazz hands. Now can someone help me get out? I've been casting my earth shaping spell with my mouth to get out."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vs43cn/wait_is_this_just_gate_180/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (179/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vogr5e/wait_is_this_just_gate_178/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vs41f2/wait_is_this_just_gate180/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (178/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vnmtqz/wait_is_this_just_gate_177/)

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BOOM!

Now that's more like it. He thought in the last few hundred feet. They would only last a split second at best.

Now what's the exit strategy? He pondered. *Oh, I should try to warn Kela.*

"KELA!" He began to yell, unsure of if she even understood words anymore.

Then his lance pierced the top of the Elemental's head.

BOOOOOOM!!!!

\----------

Kela had a split second to realize what was happening.

She couldn't smell anymore. Her nostrils and lungs were too charred for that.

She could only see out of one eye. The other having been burnt out moments before.

She was on her back, kicking up into the elemental's groin. Or rather, what would have been its groin if it had been an actual LIVING creature.

Then she saw the blue glint in front of the fiery explosion, out beyond and above the elemental.

No. She thought. *No James. Bad. Not now. Not here.*

"KELA!" She heard him scream.

And then he was piercing the Elemental.

It froze in shock as a line of cooled space opened up along its middle.

It sagged for a moment, then fell back against the wall as it reached up to touch its head with its hand.

Kela looked at the ground below the elemental's base.

He wasn't there.

KILL! She thought.

No. Her inner self said calmly in response.

And just like that she was in control again.

No. This is the chance. We kill by not killing. Just this once.

She regenerated her arms and legs as much as possible before leaping out of the hole as high as she could.

A moment later, just as the Elemental was beginning to stir again, the top of the pit sealed shut.

And the world began to shake again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/voum5b/wait_is_this_just_gate_179/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (178/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vnmq9v/wait_is_this_just_gate_177/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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BOOM!

Now that's more like it. He thought in the last few hundred feet. They would only last a split second at best.

Now what's the exit strategy? He pondered. *Oh, I should try to warn Kela.*

"KELA!" He began to yell, unsure of if she even understood words anymore.

Then his lance pierced the top of the Elemental's head.

BOOOOOOM!!!!

\----------

Kela had a split second to realize what was happening.

She couldn't smell anymore. Her nostrils and lungs were too charred for that.

She could only see out of one eye. The other having been burnt out moments before.

She was on her back, kicking up into the elemental's groin. Or rather, what would have been its groin if it had been an actual LIVING creature.

Then she saw the blue glint in front of the fiery explosion, out beyond and above the elemental.

No. She thought. *No James. Bad. Not now. Not here.*

"KELA!" She heard him scream.

And then he was piercing the Elemental.

It froze in shock as a line of cooled space opened up along its middle.

It sagged for a moment, then fell back against the wall as it reached up to touch its head with its hand.

Kela looked at the ground below the elemental's base.

He wasn't there.

KILL! She thought.

No. Her inner self said calmly in response.

And just like that she was in control again.

No. This is the chance. We kill by not killing. Just this once.

She regenerated her arms and legs as much as possible before leaping out of the hole as high as she could.

A moment later, just as the Elemental was beginning to stir again, the top of the pit sealed shut.

And the world began to shake again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/voukwf/wait_is_this_just_gate_179/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (177/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vmutht/wait_is_this_just_gate_176/)

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continued on and slammed into another griffin rider, killing them in a puff of smoke and ashes.

Then she saw the bright, light blue, trail of James's passage through the Elemental's head.

He was moving faster than anything she'd ever seen. She thought he might have even been approaching the speed of his beloved bullets.

She saw him go flying out the other side, a trail of what looked like lightning, spiraling out around him as he flew. The elemental staggered forward, landing on its hands as it struggled to reform the massive dark hole piercing all the way through its head and out of its face.

What the hell was that? She wondered as she watched him fly off into the distance, arcing downward ever so slightly. *Were those deathbolts? How was he casting them in that maneuver?*

"Come on." She said to herself as she watched, waiting for the smaller explosions that would mark his deceleration and turn. "Come on and turn around James."

But he wasn't slowing down, and no further explosions were appearing.

He was heading past the hole.

"James!" She yelled as she angled toward where he was headed.

But she knew she would never catch up to him in time. Not with how fast he was moving.

Then a massive, lupine, paw shot up out of the hole as another one slammed into the ground at the top of the hole. It moved directly in front of James and stopped him dead in his tracks, though it pulled back as he did, softening the blow drastically.

Kela? She wondered as she continued racing forward.

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I'll save you one last time. Kela thought in a moment of rare lucidity as she pulled her massive body out of the hole. *That probably hurt a lot. But you're not dead.* She thought as she lowered the catching paw and turned it over. She wasn't capable of gentleness right now, she'd simply have to hope that her thick fur had cushioned him enough to keep him from dying.

The she placed the paw on the ground outside of the hole as well and clambered up over the edge.

The elemental was staring at her still smoking form with confusion. Then its face went back to anger.

That's alright. She thought. *I'm angry too.*

Then she was charging again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vos1gr/wait_is_this_just_gate_178/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (177/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vmurao/wait_is_this_just_gate_176/) /
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Then she saw the bright, light blue, trail of James's passage through the Elemental's head.

He was moving faster than anything she'd ever seen. She thought he might have even been approaching the speed of his beloved bullets.

She saw him go flying out the other side, a trail of what looked like lightning, spiraling out around him as he flew. The elemental staggered forward, landing on its hands as it struggled to reform the massive dark hole piercing all the way through its head and out of its face.

What the hell was that? She wondered as she watched him fly off into the distance, arcing downward ever so slightly. *Were those deathbolts? How was he casting them in that maneuver?*

"Come on." She said to herself as she watched, waiting for the smaller explosions that would mark his deceleration and turn. "Come on and turn around James."

But he wasn't slowing down, and no further explosions were appearing.

He was heading past the hole.

"James!" She yelled as she angled toward where he was headed.

But she knew she would never catch up to him in time. Not with how fast he was moving.

Then a massive, lupine, paw shot up out of the hole as another one slammed into the ground at the top of the hole. It moved directly in front of James and stopped him dead in his tracks, though it pulled back as he did, softening the blow drastically.

Kela? She wondered as she continued racing forward.

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I'll save you one last time. Kela thought in a moment of rare lucidity as she pulled her massive body out of the hole. *That probably hurt a lot. But you're not dead.* She thought as she lowered the catching paw and turned it over. She wasn't capable of gentleness right now, she'd simply have to hope that her thick fur had cushioned him enough to keep him from dying.

Then she placed the paw on the ground outside of the hole as well and clambered up over the edge.

The elemental was staring at her still smoking form with confusion. Then its face went back to anger.

That's alright. She thought. *I'm angry too.*

Then she was charging again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vogr5e/wait_is_this_just_gate_178/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (176/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vm9i4w/wait_is_this_just_gate_175/)

Writer's note: [*Things heat up!*](https://c.tenor.com/pgDYymTrrtAAAAAd/monkey-badum-tss.gif)

Enjoy.

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The Elemental, though distracted by its countless attackers, couldn't miss the approaching challenger.

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"The Gauntlets of the Terizen." Amina said to herself as she fought to keep her griffin on its path. "And dispersal armor."

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"NOTHING!" Amina replied over her shoulder. "KELA JUST EQUIPPED HERSELF WELL!" She looked around, then pointed into the distance, at a field where she could see what she'd been looking for. "LOOK!" She yelled back.

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He tapped Amina's shoulders. "I THINK THIS IS MY STOP!" He yelled at her as he drew the lance and sword from where they were strapped to the griffin. He kissed Amina on the cheek one last time. "I'LL SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE!"

Amina grabbed his sword arm, holding him in place for just a moment longer.

The two of them locked eyes for a moment.

They didn't have to say it.

They both knew.

James smiled.

And then he jumped off.

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But he decided very quickly NOT to draw from that source. He had a feeling that if he did, something unpleasant would happen. Though he knew not what that would be.

Human bullet. Human bullet. HUMAN BULLET!

Explosions blasted out of James's feet and he began hurtling toward that elemental at speed.

As his arc began to descend he rolled, just like he had only days before, and began to prepare for another blast.

He was only a hundred or so yards away now and the air around him, even under the protection of the helmet and the dragon skin cloak, was like being in a furnace, or perhaps the boiler of an old steam ship under full power.

James was just about to pull some water from the CamelBak that he'd put on over his jacket and under his cloak when a massive, glowing, claw swiped through the air above his head. It caused the air around him to swirl and twist and for a moment he thought he was going to be hit by some kind of fiery blast from the impact with the elemental.. But after a moment of stabilizing himself with his air blasts, he was back on course.

Another explosion and James was flying back upwards, and even faster. A few more blasts to increase speed on the same trajectory and he'd be flying even faster than his last flight.

OH GOD! He thought as he saw the rapidly approaching form of the elemental. *THIS IS SO FUCKING STUPID!*

"SEND IT!" He yelled as a sort of war cry that felt stupid even as he said it.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Reported from the bottoms of his feet as James angled the lance forward and kept the mage's blade locked to his chest and resting against the edge of the helmet with the flat of its blade.

And then he was inside the elemental, and flying faster than he ever had before.

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"Holy fuck!" Vickers yelled to nobody in particular. "Goddam clash of titans ass shit!" He yelled as he banked Tom into a rolling dive.

The elemental roared as Kela bit down onto one of its "shoulders" causing the area around the bite to darken as her claws began raking at the thing's chest. Her lips blackened and began to curl and slough off as she held the bite, the heat of the elemental burning them even as her teeth began to crack and shatter from the heat.

"Ohhhhh I'm a fuckin' idiot!" Vickers yelled as he raised the launcher to his shoulder and began firing it one handed. He was effectively upside down as Tom plummeted downward, so he had to aim backwards, pointing the end of the barrel above the elemental's face even as he felt like he was aiming downwards.

THUNK THUNK THUNK! Went the launcher as three of the hyper compressed liquid nitrogen shells arced forward. He'd set the sensors at as high of a temperature as he could get them to. But he was uncertain as to whether the material the canisters were made of would even hold up long enough to get there. He had to assume so, otherwise why even let them be set that high. But an elemental was unknown territory as far as his knowledge went. He just knew it was hot as fuck.

Sure enough, one canister failed before it managed to impact the elemental, a cloud of thick white fog erupting from where it had burst and dropping down toward the ground quickly, though it evaporated before it even came close.

The other two though? Those impacted with great effect.

One of them struck the monster on its neck, erupting in a cloud of fog and steam and causing the elemental to let out a roar of shock. One of its three arms reached up and clamped at the now darkened spot, leaving an opening for Kela, who slammed another claw attack into it and gouged out a huge chunk of its torso.

A split second later the third and final canister of the salvo impacted on the side of the things ear. Causeing it to stagger to the side and allowing Kela to latch on with her newly formed teeth and bring it down onto its "back".

This only caused a momentary reprieve though. The Elemental's third, and rear, arm pressed down, lifting it back up off the ground even as its two front arms slammed into Kela hard enough to lift her up off of it and send her flying back several dozen yards. Though she took a chunk out of its still cooling, blackened, shoulder as she flew back.

Vickers used the opportunity to move back up, gaining elevation for a better position. He was about to raise the launcher back up again when the King, of all people, flew into his view.

"Chief Vickers?!" He asked in a startlingly loud, booming, voice as he flew past in front of Vickers and Tom.

He was wearing what Vickers could only imagine was some kind of long, beige colored, flowing cloak that had to be almost twenty feet in length. His eyes, throat, and arms were all glowing different colors as he took up a hovering position in front of Tom.

"Is that you under all that getup Chief?" He asked.

Vickers knew he wouldn't be audible under the fire hood, so he just nodded.

King Farrick nodded once, as if in approval.

"An odd choice of armor. But if it's as effective as whatever you just fired at that thing, than who am I to judge?" He gestured for Vickers to follow him for a moment, then began flying off to the side. Vickers followed.

After a few moments the King stopped and Vickers put Tom into a holding position behind him. The King pointed at something and Vickers looked.

"They're taking a note from Choi's battle codex!" The king said as he turned to Vickers. **"We need to draw it over there if we can!"**

Vickers nodded. "Got it!" He yelled, unsure if the king had heard him or not.

King Farrick smiled. Then flew off, leaving Vickers to look at the massive hole in the ground for a moment.

Then he kicked Tom back into motion.

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James had expected the heat to be unbearable as he went through the Elemental, and it was.

But it wasn't AS bad as he'd expected. He'd be a liar if he said that he'd expected Amina's plan to work. He loved and trusted the woman to death and back, and respected that she was a General. But he'd had more than a little doubt as to what the outcome of this would be.

Still. He was pleasantly surprised to find that, only a split second after piercing through the Elemental's chest, and unknowingly beating Kela's biting maw by only a fraction of a second, he'd emerged from the back of the Elemental and continued flying off into the distance.

He was still burning hot and imagined he'd be covered in burns after this was done, especially since that was only his FIRST attack on the beast. But as he rolled to do another blast off he looked back and saw the still darkened, and gaping, wound on the elemental's back as Kela brought it to the ground.

He was amazed at how large Kela had grown, at how much havoc she was wreaking on the raging elemental, even as it battered and burned her flesh off.

He finished his roll.

BOOM BOOM BOOM! Went his feet in an alternating pattern. He'd learned from his last flight to not try to change trajectory instantly.

BOOOOM! One massive explosion to get his speed back up. **BOOM BOOM BOOOOOM!**

And just like that he was flying back toward the now rising elemental.

Let's try something new. He thought as he brought the mages blade up so that it was resting against the side of the lance.

He angled his left foot a bit and then fired separate explosions from each of them.

B-B-BOOM!

And James began to spiral as he flew.

Faster. He thought. *Become a fucking bullet for this thing to eat.*

He focused as much energy as he could draw into his feet.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

And what James imagined became a reality.

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"What the fuck was that?" Colonel Muhammed asked as she pulled herself back to her feet.

Only moments earlier there had been some kind of loud roar of incomprehensible gibberish from the gate room. It had been accompanied by what could only be described as an earthquake.

"What's the status on the device?" General Krick demanded as he furiously tapped at one of the computers nearby, its tech was sitting on the ground holding a hand to a growing lump on their forehead. He slapped the computer on the side as its screen showed error messages.

"Not sure yet sir." One of the techs replied cautiously. "Whatever just happened. It was big. Wait..." They said as they looked at their screen, which was miraculously working.

Everyone looked at the young woman who'd just spoken with anticipation.

She shook her head in confusion. "I don't- I don't know how to read this. It's not making sense." She gulped. "If there's one thing its saying for sure? It's that all of that just originated from the other side."

"What the hell does that mean?" Another tech asked, beating the General to the chase.

Before the tech could answer one of the speakers began to relay a garbled radio message. They all recognized Werner's voice.

"Did-" Static interfered. "-nce that?" She asked before more static cut in. "-ime stopped. There was a lou-"

General Krick picked up one of the head sets and hit the button to speak.

"Werner? What's going on?" He asked, almost yelling. "What the hell just happened?"

"Some k-" She tried to answer. "-stortion. Like someone hit the p-" More static. "-ded like the voice of G-"

The General looked around. It was clear from their faces that everyone was wondering the same thing as him.

"What the fuck just happened over there?" He asked.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vmutht/wait_is_this_just_gate_176/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (176/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vm9grf/wait_is_this_just_gate_175/) /
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OH GOD! He thought as he saw the rapidly approaching form of the elemental. *THIS IS SO FUCKING STUPID!*

"SEND IT!" He yelled as a sort of war cry that felt stupid even as he said it.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Reported from the bottoms of his feet as James angled the lance forward and kept the mage's blade locked to his chest and resting against the edge of the helmet with the flat of its blade.

And then he was inside the elemental, and flying faster than he ever had before.

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"Holy fuck!" Vickers yelled to nobody in particular. "Goddam clash of titans ass shit!" He yelled as he banked Tom into a rolling dive.

The elemental roared as Kela bit down onto one of its "shoulders" causing the area around the bite to darken as her claws began raking at the thing's chest. Her lips blackened and began to curl and slough off as she held the bite, the heat of the elemental burning them even as her teeth began to crack and shatter from the heat.

"Ohhhhh I'm a fuckin' idiot!" Vickers yelled as he raised the launcher to his shoulder and began firing it one handed. He was effectively upside

down as Tom plummeted downward, so he had to aim backwards, pointing the end of the barrel above the elemental's face even as he felt like he was aiming downwards.

THUNK THUNK THUNK! Went the launcher as three of the hyper compressed liquid nitrogen shells arced forward. He'd set the sensors at as high of a temperature as he could get them to. But he was uncertain as to whether the material the canisters were made of would even hold up long enough to get there. He had to assume so, otherwise why even let them be set that high. But an elemental was unknown territory as far as his knowledge went. He just knew it was hot as fuck.

Sure enough, one canister failed before it managed to impact the elemental, a cloud of thick white fog erupting from where it had burst and dropping down toward the ground quickly, though it evaporated before it even came close.

The other two though? Those impacted with great effect.

One of them struck the monster on its neck, erupting in a cloud of fog and steam and causing the elemental to let out a roar of shock. One of its three arms reached up and clamped at the now darkened spot, leaving an opening for Kela, who slammed another claw attack into it and gouged out a huge chunk of its torso.

A split second later the third and final canister of the salvo impacted on the side of the things ear. Causeing it to stagger to the side and allowing Kela to latch on with her newly formed teeth and bring it down onto its "back".

This only caused a momentary reprieve though. The Elemental's third, and rear, arm pressed down, lifting it back up off the ground even as its two front arms slammed into Kela hard enough to lift her up off of it and send her flying back several dozen yards. Though she took a chunk out of its still cooling, blackened, shoulder as she flew back.

Vickers used the opportunity to move back up, gaining elevation for a better position. He was about to raise the launcher back up again when the King, of all people, flew into his view.

"Chief Vickers?!" He asked in a startlingly loud, booming, voice as he flew past in front of Vickers and Tom.

He was wearing what Vickers could only imagine was some kind of long, beige colored, flowing cloak that had to be almost twenty feet in length. His eyes, throat, and arms were all glowing different colors as he took up a hovering position in front of Tom.

"Is that you under all that getup Chief?" He asked.

Vickers knew he wouldn't be audible under the fire hood, so he just nodded.

King Farrick nodded once, as if in approval.

"An odd choice of armor. But if it's as effective as whatever you just fired at that thing, than who am I to judge?" He gestured for Vickers to follow him for a moment, then began flying off to the side. Vickers followed.

After a few moments the King stopped and Vickers put Tom into a holding position behind him. The King pointed at something and Vickers looked.

"They're taking a note from Choi's battle codex!" The king said as he turned to Vickers. **"We need to draw it over there if we can!"**

Vickers nodded. "Got it!" He yelled, unsure if the king had heard him or not.

King Farrick smiled. Then flew off, leaving Vickers to look at the massive hole in the ground for a moment.

Then he kicked Tom back into motion.

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James had expected the heat to be unbearable as he went through the Elemental, and it was.

But it wasn't AS bad as he'd expected. He'd be a liar if he said that he'd expected Amina's plan to work. He loved and trusted the woman to death and back, and respected that she was a General. But he'd had more than a little doubt as to what the outcome of this would be.

Still. He was pleasantly surprised to find that, only a split second after piercing through the Elemental's chest, and unknowingly beating Kela's biting maw by only a fraction of a second, he'd emerged from the back of the Elemental and continued flying off into the distance.

He was still burning hot and imagined he'd be covered in burns after this was done, especially since that was only his FIRST attack on the beast. But as he rolled to do another blast off he looked back and saw the still darkened, and gaping, wound on the elemental's back as Kela brought it to the ground.

He was amazed at how large Kela had grown, at how much havoc she was wreaking on the raging elemental, even as it battered and burned her flesh off.

He finished his roll.

BOOM BOOM BOOM! Went his feet in an alternating pattern. He'd learned from his last flight to not try to change trajectory instantly.

BOOOOM! One massive explosion to get his speed back up. **BOOM BOOM BOOOOOM!**

And just like that he was flying back toward the now rising elemental.

Let's try something new. He thought as he brought the mages blade up so that it was resting against the side of the lance.

He angled his left foot a bit and then fired separate explosions from each of them.

B-B-BOOM!

And James began to spiral as he flew.

Faster. He thought. *Become a fucking bullet for this thing to eat.*

He focused as much energy as he could draw into his feet.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

And what James imagined became a reality.

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"What the fuck was that?" Colonel Muhammed asked as she pulled herself back to her feet.

Only moments earlier there had been some kind of loud roar of incomprehensible gibberish from the gate room. It had been accompanied by what could only be described as an earthquake.

"What's the status on the device?" General Krick demanded as he furiously tapped at one of the computers nearby, its tech was sitting on the ground holding a hand to a growing lump on their forehead. He slapped the computer on the side as its screen showed error messages.

"Not sure yet sir." One of the techs replied cautiously. "Whatever just happened. It was big. Wait..." They said as they looked at their screen, which was miraculously working.

Everyone looked at the young woman who'd just spoken with anticipation.

She shook her head in confusion. "I don't- I don't know how to read this. It's not making sense." She gulped. "If there's one thing its saying for sure? It's that all of that just originated from the other side."

"What the hell does that mean?" Another tech asked, beating the General to the chase.

Before the tech could answer one of the speakers began to relay a garbled radio message. They all recognized Werner's voice.

"Did-" Static interfered. "-nce that?" She asked before more static cut in. "-ime stopped. There was a lou-"

General Krick picked up one of the head sets and hit the button to speak.

"Werner? What's going on?" He asked, almost yelling. "What the hell just happened?"

"Some k-" She tried to answer. "-stortion. Like someone hit the p-" More static. "-ded like the voice of G-"

The General looked around. It was clear from their faces that everyone was wondering the same thing as him.

"What the fuck just happened over there?" He asked.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vnmq9v/wait_is_this_just_gate_177/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (175/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vlz2am/wait_is_this_just_gate_174/)

Writer's note: And then shit got serious. Next chapter is big fight night time. Prepare yourselves.

Enjoy.

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Amina slapped her hand onto Kela's wrist as she grabbed the softly glowing, chalky orb.

"Kela what are you doing?" She asked, fear in her voice. "That won't help you in this."

Kela, wearing a set of perfectly fitted, shimmering, dark grey, seemingly oil-sheened armor, shook her friend's hand off and took the Moon's tear.

"It will." She replied as she walked over and picked up a pair of gauntlets that formed themselves to her clawed hands. As soon as they finished she began to move toward the exit, walking through the tide of soldiers that parted before her.

"KELA!" Amina exclaimed as she got in front of her best friend, pressing her arms into Kela's chest plate to slow her down. "Stop! That's an order!"

Kela stopped, though not because of the order, but because she could hear the desperation in her friends voice.

"Amina." She said softly. "Look at where it's at." She said, pointing in the direction that they both knew the elemental was raging out in the city. "I have to save them."

"You can't." Amina said, on the verge of tears. "I know where it is. But you can't. It'll kill you." She leaned her head against her friend's

chest, pushing against her. "And even if it doesn't. You'll never be able to return from this."

Kela reached down and grasped Amina by the shoulders, pushing her back and leaning down so they could be eye to eye.

"You'll understand some day." Kela said. She glanced over Amina's shoulder at James, who'd just tried to enter the room, but was being stopped by the magical door. "When you two have children of your own." Then she pushed Amina back firmly. "I have to go now." She looked back one last time before exiting past James. "I have to try." She turned and nodded at James, who stood staring at her in awe at the relics she was equipped with as she passed.

"Door. James Choi is a captain and a member of the royal family in all but an official capacity. Grant him entrance." Said King Farrick as he jogged into the room past him. He paused for a moment to catch his breath. The other guards looked at him in a mixture of curiosity and shock. "Gods I'm out of shape." He said to no one in particular.

The door lingered for just a moment, still barring James's entrance, then it receded. "Exception granted." it said, as it opened.

James rushed forward to Amina, who was leaning on one of the pillars in the room, holding her hand over her chest.

"Where's Kela going?" He asked as he wrapped her in his arms for a moment. "I'm so glad you're okay. The windows all shattered and I thought I heard screaming. I was worried that something might have happened to you." He said as he looked at her. "Where's Kela going?" He asked as he wrapped her in his arms for a moment.

Amina didn't answer for several seconds as James held her. Then She pushed him back gently and stood up straight, wiping her eyes. "You can't go James." She said. "Not you too. Not for this."

"What?" He asked, confused.

"You can't go this time James." She answered. "You almost died last time. And this one is almost three times the size of that one, YOU CAN NOT GO." She repeated.

James looked at her with a weak smile. "You're going aren't you?" He asked.

"Of course I'm going." She replied. "I'm the General. This is my city. I must."

"Hon. If you're fighting, I'm fighting." James said with a small, fake, chuckle. "I know you guys probably don't have this saying in your world. But on Earth I'm what's called, 'Ride or die'. So if you're going, I'm going."

"James-" She began.

He cut her off with a light punch to her breastplate. When she looked down he swept his hand up and tapped her chin. She looked at him in shock.

"Yeah... I probably will." He said, as if he knew what she'd been about to say. "But the way I see it, I can fly now. I've got more spells. And I know what these things are capable of." He smiled a bit as he looked at her. "That's got you beat by one factor, since I'm assuming that you're gonna be on a griffin."

"That's not the point James." She said, growing more distressed with each second. "And you only just learned to fly two days ago, and even that almost killed you."

Suddenly King Farrick appeared next to them. He was wearing a set of ornate robes that were bejeweled in such a way that they seemed to have writing on them. The letters weren't the symbols that James had grown familiar with since arriving. And they seemed to squirm as he looked at them. As if they were alive. He also had a pair of, what appeared to be, brass knuckles on his hands that James could feel magical energy flowing off of. Amina looked at his new ensemble with confusion.

"Me old armor doesn't fit my gut anymore." He said in response to her gaze. "My dear." He began. "This is, as you know, likely the end of the capital. We'll be lucky if we have enough surviving refugees to even call this a city afterward. You and I are going to fight. We'll probably die." He said gravely as he flexed his fingers. Sparks spread between them. "If he wishes to join you?...." He let it hang for a moment. "Well. What better way to fall than fighting beside your loved one in battle?"

"Father." She said in surprise.

But he was already marching out the door, several of the newly equipped Captains beside him as he went.

She stood, rooted, and breathing heavily, for several long moments as she thought. Then she turned to him. When she did her face had hardened, and her eyes burned with an inner fire.

"Fine then." She said, sounding significantly more certain of herself now. "You're going to be flying in that ridiculous explosion style, right?" She asked as she began moving toward one of the weapon displays. "Not riding Steve?"

"Yeah. All props to Steve. He's the best." James said with a shake of his head. "But I feel like he might be a bit slow for this one."

"Do you have your mage's blade?" She asked.

James pulled the blade from the bottomless bag that he'd made a habit of keeping over his shoulder.

"Good. Lose the bag, You don't want it getting destroyed. Keep the blade." She looked at several of the weapons on the wall. "It'll drink in the Elemental's energy, and should provide you with a sort of channel of.... well... not safety.... but it should protect you a bit. Just keep it between you and the beast." She reached up and pulled a weapon James hadn't expected her to choose. She turned and handed it to him. "Wyrm's fang." She said as he took it. "Made from, well, an ice wyrm's fang. Specifically Lagarsh the Lake Eater."

"It's a lance." James said as he held the nearly ten foot long sharpened pole up in the air. "And it's fuckin' heavy. Goddam." With his new strength it wasn't an issue, but he estimated it as being nearly a hundred pounds.

"Hence why nobody has grabbed it." She said as she moved over to a set of display armors. "Lances are difficult to use even when they don't weigh that much. But it'll freeze anything it pierces." She inspected the display card of a set of chain-mail that was on a rack. She shook her head and moved on.

"Won't I need to... you know, pierce the elemental to use it?" He asked.

"Yes." She replied as she picked up a set of shoulder guards and held them out to him. "Take these. They'll let your arms move faster." She said as she moved onto the next display item. After inspecting this one, a ring, she slipped it onto a finger on her right hand. Then she got to a helmet and read its card. Her eyes widened for a moment. "Useless at any other time. Fantastic under the circumstances." She said before handing it to him.

"What's this one do?" James asked as he struggled to hold all the items.

"It's an old gag gift." She said with a chuckle. "When worn it produces a spray of high pressure air from all sides. The mage responsible designed it to be a sort of... umbrella, for when it rains."

James looked at the bullet shaped helmet dubiously. "Um... okay..." He said, the doubt evident in his tone.

She turned back to him.

"Think about how you fly and what you'll need to do James." She said. "Then piece together how these will all work together.

James looked at the items in his hands.

"Blade that drinks magical energy. Faster arms. A lance that freezes. A helmet that's an air umbrella. flying like a bullet." He thought for a second. "You're turning me into a missile?"

"I don't know. I didn't really get to see how those things worked up close. I sure hope you don't explode like they do. But I am turning you into a human arrow though." She countered as she picked up a massive, double handed, hammer that had a clear, and luminous, gem set into the

middle of the head. She focused for a moment and the gem began emitting light blue light. She touched it to the display it had been on and ice began to form. "Perfect." She said.

She turned and quickly grabbed James around the waist and pulled him into a kiss, causing him to drop the relics in surprise as his hands moved to her waist and neck.

"Let's go kill a continental class elemental." She said as she broke off the kiss.

James blinked a few times, still recovering from the shock. "Can I get one more of those before we fly off to our deaths?" He asked.

Amina smiled, with a crazed look in her eyes, and gave him an answer.

My mom is going to fight her way here and kill my charcoal remains when she finds out how goddam stupid I am. He thought as he began strapping the shoulder pads on over his leather jacket.

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"I don't currently know what the situation is sir." Ambassador Werner said into the camera on the communication hub. "There was some kind of explosion out in the city, and then everyone began scrambling. The king just gave some kind of city wide broadcast ordering the Army to muster, and for everyone else to fight for their lives. Then one of his aides informed me that the King wanted me on standby here in case they needed to request aide. As per our agreement."

"What of Captain Choi and Chief Vickers?" General Krick asked. "Where are they at?"

"I don't know yet-" She began before the door to the room was thrown open violently.

Vickers rushed in.

"Vickers?" The General said from his screen. "Where's Choi?"

"Probably running off to do something stupid." Vickers answered as he looked at the screen. "Sir do you guys have any of those fire suppression canister launchers? The ones they made for the hydrogen fires that the E.U.F. started causing to mess with our mobile sites."

The general looked around in shock for a moment. "I think we have one or two of those." He replied. "Why?"

Vickers told them what happened. How he and Choi had been walking along when an explosion had gone off that was violent enough to make him suspect some kind of nuke. How he'd gone to the top of the castle wall once the wind had died down a bit more. And finally, how he'd seen what he could only describe as a living manifestation of fire that looked like something out of the old testament.

"Well then where the hell is Choi?" Werner asked. "He's supposed to report here in times of emergency."

"He didn't say anything to me." Vickers replied. He just leapt off the wall and bolted toward the castle like a damn cheetah on speed. And I had that injured guard that I had to get to safety before I could get here."

"What's the plan chief?" The General asked. "We can deal with the Captain later."

Vickers turned back to the camera.

"Rustle up one of those devices and as many canisters as it can get. Plus as many tubs of aloe vera and burn creme as you can find and send em through." He thought for a moment. "And while you're at it, I could use one of those fancy silver suits that the F.D.'s usually save for the real bad fires. I feel like that's gonna come in handy. Plus the re-breather to go with it."

General Krick nodded. "How bad's the damage on that side? Any estimate?" He asked.

Vickers took a deep breath as he thought about what he'd seen in his peek over the wall.

"Think thermo detonating in a downtown metropolis sir. Only this one is lingering, and mobile."

"Jesus Christ." The General said as Werner gasped at the visual. "You have ten minutes Chief. Find Choi if you can. But that's as fast as I think we'll be able to get anything over there."

"Sir what about the emergency aide agreement?" Werner weighed in.

"Yes. What about that?" Said a voice from the Earth side. Secretary Grant appeared from the side of the camera's view. General Krick hung his head for a moment. "We've got a system for these kinds of things General."

General Krick rounded on the Secretary with an angry look on his face.

"They just had a goddam mini-nuke equivalent monster appear in the middle of a damn city!" The General hissed at Grant.

"And has the King or any of his listed, authorized, leaders made an official request for aide?" Grant countered, not backing down from the General, who was now in his face.

"Thousands of people are going to die!" The General replied. "Thousands probably already have!"

Grant placed his hands on his waist, pushing his jacket back as he did. "And that's a damn tragedy. But it's one that I'm sure has happened before, and will happen again in the future, in other cities. I'm sure the Kingdom has dealt with it before." He said in response, his voice raising slightly in response to Krick's volume increase.

"And we might be able to help stop it!"

"NOT WITHOUT OFFICIAL REQUEST FOR AIDE!" Grant fired back. "AND EVEN THEN WE'RE NOT GIVING THEM TECH OF THAT LEVEL!"

The General was about to yell back at Grant when Vickers interrupted.

"SIRS!" He yelled, causing both of them to look at their screen. "If I may?" He said much more calmly.

"WHAT?" Grant yelled. Then he seemed to realize that he'd lashed out at someone he hadn't meant to. He coughed and adjusted his tie as a cover. "What is it Chief?" He asked, anger still evident in his tone.

"As the officially designated officer in charge of maintaining physical security on behalf of all Earth forces currently stationed at this location I am making an official request pursuant to carrying out my duty. Such request entails the supplies previously mentioned, which shall remain in my care until such time as they may be turned in, and which I will gladly sign a hand receipt for at the first opportunity." He took a deep breath. "Having seen the entity in question I officially deem it a hazard not only to the local civilian population, the local government employees of the government that we're attempting diplomatic relations with. But also for the two charges under my protection. As such I intend to engage the entity. But cannot feasibly do so without the listed materiel."

"Chief!" Werner hissed at him this time.

"GRANTED!" General Krick said before Werner or Grant could say anything else. He looked at Grant, who was glaring at him. "We'll have the supplies on their way in ten." He stared grant down. "Unless you can run it past the President faster than that, Secretary." He spit out.

Grant lingered, staring at him. Then he stormed out of the room.

General Krick watched him leave, waiting for the door to shut fully before turning back to the camera.

"That was probably a star right there." He said with a sigh. "Probably gonna be re-stationed to Fort Saterdal after this." He took a deep breath. "Make it count Chief."

Vickers nodded at the camera. "Aye aye sir." He said before turning to leave.

"And Vickers." The general added, causing the SEAL to turn back for a moment. "Try to keep Choi from dying. If you can."

Vickers tilted his head. "I'll... give it the old college try... sir." He replied before exiting the room.

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Kela's eyes watered from the heat of the Elemental, the tears evaporated almost as soon as they fell from the corner of her eyes.

She'd run here as fast as she could, running past the countless injured, trapped, scared, people that had passed on the way. She'd even past around the glassy, smoking, crater that she assumed had been the Elemental's emergence point, however it had gotten here. She new from the melted entry arch that it had been the temple to the god of warmth and comfort, and hoped that the Elemental hadn't been summoned by some foolish ritual to worship their god.

But that wasn't her problem. The path that the Elemental's massive scorch mark had left behind was.

It had gone, at least for the first half a mile, the direction she'd dreaded the most.

The buildings nearest the path were charred husks. Houses, restaurants, shops, stables. All of them were burnt to cinders and slag for hundreds of yards. The pads of her feet burned from the heat of the earth beneath her as she'd run.

This elemental wasn't like the one James had faced before.

That one had likely been a manifestation of nature's wrath and the latent magical energy of the area around where it had formed.

This was something else.

This was a weapon. She just new it.

An elemental this size didn't just appear out of thin air without someone or something to create or summon it.

This kind of elemental was a country killer.

But that will all be someone else's problem. She thought as she pulled the tear of the moon goddess from her belt pouch. It's cool surface and lunar energy eased the burning pain in the skin of her hand.

She kneeled down and held the orb in both hands as she prepared to use it.

Suddenly something impacted the ground near her.

She looked, expecting to see some piece of debris, or maybe a fireball from the elemental. But instead saw James and Amina hopping off of a griffin. They were both wearing dragon-skin cloaks, she saw.

"Don't try to stop me!" She yelled over the roar of the Elemental inferno.

"I have to!" James yelled back. "Amina told me what you're going to do! It won't work!"

"She doesn't know what I'm doing." Kela said softly as James got close. "I'm not using it the way you think!"

James looked back at Amina curiously. Amina shook her head. She didn't know what Kela was talking about either.

"There's another way to use the tear!" Kela said, reading their expression. "Its.... worse... but much more powerful."

"No Kela!" James exclaimed as he reached for Kela's wrist. Kela pulled back and raised her arm up over his reach.

"James." She said softly as he struggled to reach the white orb. "Do you remember the first command you ever gave me?" She asked.

James paused, confused at the question. "What?" he asked.

"Back when you first woke up in this world. When you found out that I was in your pack." She said. "Do you remember the first command you gave me as my new pack leader?"

"What? Why?" He asked.

She lowered herself down to look him in the eye, like she'd done for Amina earlier.

"You'll see." She said. "Take good care of each other." She looked back over his shoulder at Amina and smiled. "I'm sorry I killed your Sergeant. But I'm glad I got to meet you James."

James looked at her in confusion.

Before he could react Kela tossed the softball sized orb into her mouth and bit down hard, cracking it in half at first. Then it shattered, and she enclosed the shards in her mouth and began to swallow.

James was momentarily blinded by a bright white light that outshone even the flames of the Elemental only a half mile away.

"AAAAAAGGH!" Kela cried out as she fell back to her knees. There was a sickening crunch that seemed to emanate from every part of Kela's body simultaneously as the bones underneath began to grow. Then there was a wet tearing noise as muscles and skin and organs began to reshape themselves.

Amina rushed over to James and began pulling him back. But James struggled against her, as he watched the transformation overtake his friend. THEIR friend.

Kela's back arched and her eyes flew open, the white light that had originally been in her mouth now shone out of them like they were high powered flashlights. Her teeth grew so rapidly that several of them stabbed through her lips. Then those too began to grow, healing almost immediately as they did.

Her mouth flew open as she screamed again.

"AAAAAAGGGGGHHHH!!"

Then, as Kela continued to grow in size, and morph into a shape that James struggled to comprehend compared to the creature she'd been. The scream transformed into a howl so low and loud that James's head hurt from it's volume and tone.

"WWWWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHH!!!!"

As Amina finally got James to turn and run toward the waiting, and clearly anxious griffin, he glanced back one time.

She'd grown from a seven foot tall armored werewolf, to a nearly fifteen foot long, still (somehow) armored, embodyment of everything lupine. She was on all fours, and her long, still gauntleted, claws dug into the ground like massive spikes as she continued to grow and form. Her fur was growing long and shaggy. Her mouth hung open, and thick viscous drool slavered from her long sharp looking tongue, before landing on the ground and drying almost immediately.

"James we have to go!" Amina yelled into his ear. "It's not safe here anymore."

"What's she done to herself?" He asked as he mounted up behind her.

Amina glanced at the unrecognizable form of her best friend. Tears rapidly dried on her cheeks as she turned back.

"What she has to." She said, before kicking her mount into motion.

As they flew up into the sky they heard another howl from Kela's new form. It seemed to make the very air vibrate around them, and made their hearts ache with what they knew it meant.

James thought he heard other howls erupt in reply from all over the parts of the city that hadn't already been destroyed.

I'm going to kill this thing. He thought as he pressed into Amina's back.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vmutht/wait_is_this_just_gate_176/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (175/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vkvup8/wait_is_this_just_gate_174/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: And then shit got serious. Next chapter is big fight night time. Prepare yourselves.

Enjoy.

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nodded at James, who stood staring at her in awe at the relics she was equipped with as she passed.

"Door. James Choi is a captain and a member of the royal family in all but an official capacity. Grant him entrance." Said King Farrick as he jogged into the room past him. He paused for a moment to catch his breath. The other guards looked at him in a mixture of curiosity and shock. "Gods I'm out of shape." He said to no one in particular.

The door lingered for just a moment, still barring James's entrance, then it receded. "Exception granted." it said, as it opened.

James rushed forward to Amina, who was leaning on one of the pillars in the room, holding her hand over her chest.

"Where's Kela going?" He asked as he wrapped her in his arms for a moment. "I'm so glad you're okay. The windows all shattered and I thought I heard screaming. I was worried that something might have happened to you." He said as he looked at her. "Where's Kela going?" He asked as he wrapped her in his arms for a moment.

Amina didn't answer for several seconds as James held her. Then She pushed him back gently and stood up straight, wiping her eyes. "You can't go James." She said. "Not you too. Not for this."

"What?" He asked, confused.

"You can't go this time James." She answered. "You almost died last time. And this one is almost three times the size of that one, YOU CAN NOT GO." She repeated.

James looked at her with a weak smile. "You're going aren't you?" He asked.

"Of course I'm going." She replied. "I'm the General. This is my city. I must."

"Hon. If you're fighting, I'm fighting." James said with a small, fake, chuckle. "I know you guys probably don't have this saying in your world. But on Earth I'm what's called, 'Ride or die'. So if you're going, I'm going."

"James-" She began.

He cut her off with a light punch to her breastplate. When she looked down he swept his hand up and tapped her chin. She looked at him in shock.

"Yeah... I probably will." He said, as if he knew what she'd been about to say. "But the way I see it, I can fly now. I've got more spells. And I know what these things are capable of." He smiled a bit as he looked at her. "That's got you beat by one factor, since I'm assuming that you're gonna be on a griffin."

"That's not the point James." She said, growing more distressed with each second. "And you only just learned to fly two days ago, and even that almost killed you."

Suddenly King Farrick appeared next to them. He was wearing a set of ornate robes that were bejeweled in such a way that they seemed to have writing on them. The letters weren't the symbols that James had grown familiar with since arriving. And they seemed to squirm as he looked at them. As if they were alive. He also had a pair of, what appeared to be, brass knuckles on his hands that James could feel magical energy flowing off of. Amina looked at his new ensemble with confusion.

"Me old armor doesn't fit my gut anymore." He said in response to her gaze. "My dear." He began. "This is, as you know, likely the end of the capital. We'll be lucky if we have enough surviving refugees to even call this a city afterward. You and I are going to fight. We'll probably die." He said gravely as he flexed his fingers. Sparks spread between them. "If he wishes to join you?...." He let it hang for a moment. "Well. What better way to fall than fighting beside your loved one in battle?"

"Father." She said in surprise.

But he was already marching out the door, several of the newly equipped Captains beside him as he went.

She stood, rooted, and breathing heavily, for several long moments as she thought. Then she turned to him. When she did her face had hardened, and her eyes burned with an inner fire.

"Fine then." She said, sounding significantly more certain of herself now. "You're going to be flying in that ridiculous explosion style, right?" She asked as she began moving toward one of the weapon displays. "Not riding Steve?"

"Yeah. All props to Steve. He's the best." James said with a shake of his head. "But I feel like he might be a bit slow for this one."

"Do you have your mage's blade?" She asked.

James pulled the blade from the bottomless bag that he'd made a habit of keeping over his shoulder.

"Good. Lose the bag, You don't want it getting destroyed. Keep the blade." She looked at several of the weapons on the wall. "It'll drink in the Elemental's energy, and should provide you with a sort of channel of.... well... not safety.... but it should protect you a bit. Just keep it between you and the beast." She reached up and pulled a weapon James hadn't expected her to choose. She turned and handed it to him. "Wyrm's fang." She said as he took it. "Made from, well, an ice wyrm's fang. Specifically Lagarsh the Lake Eater."

"It's a lance." James said as he held the nearly ten foot long sharpened pole up in the air. "And it's fuckin' heavy. Goddam." With his new

strength it wasn't an issue, but he estimated it as being nearly a hundred pounds.

"Hence why nobody has grabbed it." She said as she moved over to a set of display armors. "Lances are difficult to use even when they don't weigh that much. But it'll freeze anything it pierces." She inspected the display card of a set of chain-mail that was on a rack. She shook her head and moved on.

"Won't I need to... you know, pierce the elemental to use it?" He asked.

"Yes." She replied as she picked up a set of shoulder guards and held them out to him. "Take these. They'll let your arms move faster." She said as she moved onto the next display item. After inspecting this one, a ring, she slipped it onto a finger on her right hand. Then she got to a helmet and read its card. Her eyes widened for a moment. "Useless at any other time. Fantastic under the circumstances." She said before handing it to him.

"What's this one do?" James asked as he struggled to hold all the items.

"It's an old gag gift." She said with a chuckle. "When worn it produces a spray of high pressure air from all sides. The mage responsible designed it to be a sort of... umbrella, for when it rains."

James looked at the bullet shaped helmet dubiously. "Um... okay..." He said, the doubt evident in his tone.

She turned back to him.

"Think about how you fly and what you'll need to do James." She said. "Then piece together how these will all work together.

James looked at the items in his hands.

"Blade that drinks magical energy. Faster arms. A lance that freezes. A helmet that's an air umbrella. flying like a bullet." He thought for a second. "You're turning me into a missile?"

"I don't know. I didn't really get to see how those things worked up close. I sure hope you don't explode like they do. But I am turning you into a human arrow though." She countered as she picked up a massive, double handed, hammer that had a clear, and luminous, gem set into the middle of the head. She focused for a moment and the gem began emitting light blue light. She touched it to the display it had been on and ice began to form. "Perfect." She said.

She turned and quickly grabbed James around the waist and pulled him into a kiss, causing him to drop the relics in surprise as his hands moved to her waist and neck.

"Let's go kill a continental class elemental." She said as she broke off the kiss.

James blinked a few times, still recovering from the shock. "Can I get one more of those before we fly off to our deaths?" He asked.

Amina smiled, with a crazed look in her eyes, and gave him an answer.

My mom is going to fight her way here and kill my charcoal remains when she finds out how goddam stupid I am. He thought as he began strapping the shoulder pads on over his leather jacket.

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"I don't currently know what the situation is sir." Ambassador Werner said into the camera on the communication hub. "There was some kind of explosion out in the city, and then everyone began scrambling. The king just gave some kind of city wide broadcast ordering the Army to muster, and for everyone else to fight for their lives. Then one of his aides informed me that the King wanted me on standby here in case they needed to request aide. As per our agreement."

"What of Captain Choi and Chief Vickers?" General Krick asked. "Where are they at?"

"I don't know yet-" She began before the door to the room was thrown open violently.

Vickers rushed in.

"Vickers?" The General said from his screen. "Where's Choi?"

"Probably running off to do something stupid." Vickers answered as he looked at the screen. "Sir do you guys have any of those fire suppression canister launchers? The ones they made for the hydrogen fires that the E.U.F. started causing to mess with our mobile sites."

The general looked around in shock for a moment. "I think we have one or two of those." He replied. "Why?"

Vickers told them what happened. How he and Choi had been walking along when an explosion had gone off that was violent enough to make him suspect some kind of nuke. How he'd gone to the top of the castle wall once the wind had died down a bit more. And finally, how he'd seen what he could only describe as a living manifestation of fire that looked like something out of the old testament.

"Well then where the hell is Choi?" Werner asked. "He's supposed to report here in times of emergency."

"He didn't say anything to me." Vickers replied. "He just leapt off the wall and bolted toward the castle like a damn cheetah on speed. And I had that injured guard that I had to get to safety before I could get here."

"What's the plan chief?" The General asked. "We can deal with the Captain later."

Vickers turned back to the camera.

"Rustle up one of those devices and as many canisters as it can get. Plus as many tubs of aloe vera and burn creme as you can find and send em through." He thought for a moment. "And while you're at it, I could use one of those fancy silver suits that the F.D.'s usually save for the real bad fires. I feel like that's gonna come in handy. Plus the re-breather to go with it."

General Krick nodded. "How bad's the damage on that side? Any estimate?" He asked.

Vickers took a deep breath as he thought about what he'd seen in his peek over the wall.

"Think thermo detonating in a downtown metropolis sir. Only this one is lingering, and mobile."

"Jesus Christ." The General said as Werner gasped at the visual. "You have ten minutes Chief. Find Choi if you can. But that's as fast as I think we'll be able to get anything over there."

"Sir what about the emergency aide agreement?" Werner weighed in.

"Yes. What about that?" Said a voice from the Earth side. Secretary Grant appeared from the side of the camera's view. General Krick hung his head for a moment. "We've got a system for these kinds of things General."

General Krick rounded on the Secretary with an angry look on his face.

"They just had a goddam mini-nuke equivalent monster appear in the middle of a damn city!" The General hissed at Grant.

"And has the King or any of his listed, authorized, leaders made an official request for aide?" Grant countered, not backing down from the General, who was now in his face.

"Thousands of people are going to die!" The General replied. "Thousands probably already have!"

Grant placed his hands on his waist, pushing his jacket back as he did. "And that's a damn tragedy. But it's one that I'm sure has happened before, and will happen again in the future, in other cities. I'm sure the Kingdom has dealt with it before." He said in response, his voice raising slightly in response to Krick's volume increase.

"And we might be able to help stop it!"

"NOT WITHOUT OFFICIAL REQUEST FOR AIDE!" Grant fired back. "AND EVEN THEN WE'RE NOT GIVING THEM TECH OF THAT LEVEL!"

The General was about to yell back at Grant when Vickers interrupted.

"SIRS!" He yelled, causing both of them to look at their screen. "If I may?" He said much more calmly.

"WHAT?" Grant yelled. Then he seemed to realize that he'd lashed out at someone he hadn't meant to. He coughed and adjusted his tie as a cover. "What is it Chief?" He asked, anger still evident in his tone.

"As the officially designated officer in charge of maintaining physical security on behalf of all Earth forces currently stationed at this location I am making an official request pursuant to carrying out my duty. Such request entails the supplies previously mentioned, which shall remain in my care until such time as they may be turned in, and which I will gladly sign a hand receipt for at the first opportunity." He took a deep breath. "Having seen the entity in question I officially deem it a hazard not only to the local civilian population, the local government employees of the government that we're attempting diplomatic relations with. But also for the two charges under my protection. As such I intend to engage the entity. But cannot feasibly do so without the listed materiel."

"Chief!" Werner hissed at him this time.

"GRANTED!" General Krick said before Werner or Grant could say anything else. He looked at Grant, who was glaring at him. "We'll have the supplies on their way in ten." He stared grant down. "Unless you can run it past the President faster than that, Secretary." He spit out.

Grant lingered, staring at him. Then he stormed out of the room.

General Krick watched him leave, waiting for the door to shut fully before turning back to the camera.

"That was probably a star right there." He said with a sigh. "Probably gonna be re-stationed to Fort Saterdal after this." He took a deep breath. "Make it count Chief."

Vickers nodded at the camera. "Aye aye sir." He said before turning to leave.

"And Vickers." The general added, causing the SEAL to turn back for a moment. "Try to keep Choi from dying. If you can."

Vickers tilted his head. "I'll... give it the old college try... sir." He replied before exiting the room.

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Kela's eyes watered from the heat of the Elemental, the tears evaporated almost as soon as they fell from the corner of her eyes.

She'd run here as fast as she could, running past the countless injured, trapped, scared, people that she had passed on the way. She'd even passed around the glassy, smoking, crater that she assumed had been the Elemental's emergence point, however it had gotten here. She new from the

melted entry arch that it had been the temple to the god of warmth and comfort, and hoped that the Elemental hadn't been summoned by some foolish ritual to worship their god.

But that wasn't her problem. The path that the Elemental's massive scorch mark had left behind was.

It had gone, at least for the first half a mile, the direction she'd dreaded the most.

The buildings nearest the path were charred husks. Houses, restaurants, shops, stables. All of them were burnt to cinders and slag for hundreds of yards. The pads of her feet burned from the heat of the earth beneath her as she'd run.

This elemental wasn't like the one James had faced before.

That one had likely been a manifestation of nature's wrath and the latent magical energy of the area around where it had formed.

This was something else.

This was a weapon. She just new it.

An elemental this size didn't just appear out of thin air without someone or something to create or summon it.

This kind of elemental was a country killer.

But that will all be someone else's problem. She thought as she pulled the tear of the moon goddess from her belt pouch. It's cool surface and lunar energy eased the burning pain in the skin of her hand.

She kneeled down and held the orb in both hands as she prepared to use it.

Suddenly something impacted the ground near her.

She looked, expecting to see some piece of debris, or maybe a fireball from the elemental. But instead saw James and Amina hopping off of a griffin. They were both wearing dragon-skin cloaks, she saw.

"Don't try to stop me!" She yelled over the roar of the Elemental inferno.

"I have to!" James yelled back. "Amina told me what you're going to do! It won't work!"

"She doesn't know what I'm doing." Kela said softly as James got close. "I'm not using it the way you think!"

James looked back at Amina curiously. Amina shook her head. She didn't know what Kela was talking about either.

"There's another way to use the tear!" Kela said, reading their expression. "Its.... worse... but much more powerful."

"No Kela!" James exclaimed as he reached for Kela's wrist. Kela pulled back and raised her arm up over his reach.

"James." She said softly as he struggled to reach the white orb. "Do you remember the first command you ever gave me?" She asked.

James paused, confused at the question. "What?" he asked.

"Back when you first woke up in this world. When you found out that I was in your pack." She said. "Do you remember the first command you gave me as my new pack leader?"

"What? Why?" He asked.

She lowered herself down to look him in the eye, like she'd done for Amina earlier.

"You'll see." She said. "Take good care of each other." She looked back over his shoulder at Amina and smiled. "I'm sorry I killed your Sergeant. But I'm glad I got to meet you James."

James looked at her in confusion.

Before he could react Kela tossed the softball sized orb into her mouth and bit down hard, cracking it in half at first. Then it shattered, and she enclosed the shards in her mouth and began to swallow.

James was momentarily blinded by a bright white light that outshone even the flames of the Elemental only a half mile away.

"AAAAAAGGH!" Kela cried out as she fell back to her knees. There was a sickening crunch that seemed to emanate from every part of Kela's body simultaneously as the bones underneath began to grow. Then there was a wet tearing noise as muscles and skin and organs began to reshape themselves.

Amina rushed over to James and began pulling him back. But James struggled against her, as he watched the transformation overtake his friend. THEIR friend.

Kela's back arched and her eyes flew open, the white light that had originally been in her mouth now shone out of them like they were high powered flashlights. Her teeth grew so rapidly that several of them stabbed through her lips. Then those too began to grow, healing almost immediately as they did.

Her mouth flew open as she screamed again.

"AAAAAAGGGGGHHHH!!"

Then, as Kela continued to grow in size, and morph into a shape that James struggled to comprehend compared to the creature she'd been. The scream transformed into a howl so low and loud that James's head hurt from it's volume and tone.

"WWWWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHH!!!!"

As Amina finally got James to turn and run toward the waiting, and clearly anxious griffin, he glanced back one time.

She'd grown from a seven foot tall armored werewolf, to a nearly fifteen foot long, still (somehow) armored, embodyment of everything lupine. She was on all fours, and her long, still gauntleted, claws dug into the ground like massive spikes as she continued to grow and form. Her fur was growing long and shaggy. Her mouth hung open, and thick viscous drool slavered from her long sharp looking tongue, before landing on the ground and drying almost immediately.

"James we have to go!" Amina yelled into his ear. "It's not safe here anymore."

"What's she done to herself?" He asked as he mounted up behind her.

Amina glanced at the unrecognizable form of her best friend. Tears rapidly dried on her cheeks as she turned back.

"What she has to." She said, before kicking her mount into motion.

As they flew up into the sky they heard another howl from Kela's new form. It seemed to make the very air vibrate around them, and made their hearts ache with what they knew it meant.

James thought he heard other howls erupt in reply from all over the parts of the city that hadn't already been destroyed.

I'm going to kill this thing. He thought as he pressed into Amina's back.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vmurao/wait_is_this_just_gate_176/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (174/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vk8hc1/wait_is_this_just_gate173/)

Writer's note: Told you I'd add one today. This might just be the longest chapter I've ever written.

Til then, enjoy.

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Nguyen looked down the throat of the massive, dusky brown dragon as its mouth opened. It had countless, dagger sized, glass-like rows of teeth that would have made a T-Rex jealous. He could see a light beginning to build deep within that he knew meant his death.

He closed his eyes as he saw it begin to pull its head back. This was it. In a second, they'd all be a pile of ash and charred flesh on the edge of some random desert in a different universe than the one they'd been born in.

Suddenly there was a loud clanging noise from up above, and Nguyen felt the heat dissipate almost immediately.

"**Dusty! Knock it off!"** Said a gruff, slightly gravelly voice from somewhere above the dragon.

Nguyen opened his eyes slowly, not sure if he wanted to.

The dragon looked almost... sad?

Before he could register what was happening an armored head and shoulders popped up over the dragon's head. A hand appeared and opened the visor of the helmet.

"Who are you lot?" The person asked. Nguyen thought they might've been a dwarf, but he wouldn't know until he saw them standing up, assuming they weren't already. "And what are you doin' way out here in the Chill Dunes?" The rider asked.

"We're uh... we're researchers." Nguyen answered as he stood up. "Specifically, cartographers." He looked back and saw that Sticky was holding the fifty-caliber rifle aimed at the dragon's head in shaky hands as he lay on his back. Its bipod was resting on his shins. "May I ask who you are? And also, what you're doing out here as well?"

"Depends." Answered the dwarf. "Is that thing that ole shaky there is holding goin' to kill me or Dusty?"

"Not unless you or... Dusty... tries to kill us." Nguyen retorted.

"Well than go ahead and lower it." The rider replied. "We only came over to see who you are."

Nguyen signaled to Sticky. But Sticky was too focused on the dragon to see it.

"Sticky!" Nguyen hissed. "Drop it."

Sticky looked at him, unsure. Then, slowly, he lowered the weapon onto his chest and held his hands up.

Nguyen heard a slight thud, and looked back to see that the rider, he'd been right about them being a dwarf, had slid off of the dragon's neck and was now standing beside it.

"Go find yourself some breakfast ya big bag o' sand." He said as he gave the side of the dragon's neck a kick. "And not here."

Nguyen watched in fascination as the dragon looked at the small dwarf for a moment, then back at the party, then nuzzled the dwarf with its massive head, and turned to leave. A few moments, and a small sandstorm later, and it was in the air flying away.

Nguyen looked back at the dwarf, who held out his hand in greeting.

"Sherk Dunebasher. Nice to meet ya." He said as Nguyen took his arm in the local greeting shake. "Not too often Dusty and I see anyone out here. In fact, basically never. Now tell me, why are a bunch of cartographers mapping this desolate place? It aint changed in... gods... a couple of millennia at least."

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"That's it boy." Milo said as he tied his secondary anchor rope to one of the anchor points that were on the steeple and undid his first one so he could move up some more. "Just like that, you're doin fine."

Fredy was about ten feet lower on the roof and slowly moving his way up the angled tiles, shaking like a leaf. He didn't respond as he moved his next anchor rope into its position, right where Milo had put one of his.

"Another fifteen feet and I'll be at the spine." Milo said as he repeated the anchor switching process. "Then I'll help you out by pulling the tether. Few feet later and we'll be on the higher part of the steeple. Easy after that."

Fredy continued to not respond. He was focused on simply putting one foot in front of, and higher than, the other. That, and making sure his anchor ropes were properly placed.

Milo watched him for a moment. He knew his son was more scared than he'd ever been in his life. Probably even more scared than he'd been when he was standing outside of the Briarton's house with a bundle of flowers so he could ask little Meri Briarton to allow him to court her.

Indeed, Milo couldn't help but be proud of his son for toughing this out. Especially since he knew that young Fredy was only doing it to make him happy.

"Good. Good. Keep going." He said as he watched. "Look out for that dark tile a few feet ahead of you. When I stepped on it, it felt kind of-" Suddenly his lead foot slipped on a loose tile of its own. He began sliding down the roof on his stomach.

"PA!" Fredy yelled. Without realizing it he dashed forward to help his father, only stopping when his anchor lines snapped taut. "FATHER!" He yelled.

But Milo was fine. His own anchor lines had stopped him only a few feet lower than he'd been when his foot had slipped. He pushed himself up and grabbed at the leg of a statue that one of the lines was still tied to.

"See." He said with a large smile. "Even if you do screw up. We've worked out the kinks. I'm fine boy. Just got a bruised ego for lookin' a fool. " He made a show of dusting off his knee, which he wouldn't admit actually hurt quite a bit now. It'd bruise for sure. "And look at you. Damn near runnin' up here to save me."

"I'd thought you'd fallen." Fredy said as he caught his breath and clamped back down on the side of the steeple.

"Nah." Milo countered. He shuffled his way back up to where he'd been and bent down to inspect the tile. "I'm fine." He pulled the tile loose to see if the wood underneath was rotten. If it was he'd have to tell the temple priests so they could get it looked at.

It came off easily, with a slight squelch. *Sure enough.* He thought. *Timber's bad. Priests won't be happy about that. Not in the house of warmth and comfort.*

As the tile popped off something shiny and red popped out with it. It clinked and bounced as it slid down the tiled roof. It looked almost like a dark red ruby.

"Say what's that?" Milo asked as it bounced downward. "Grab it boy."

But Fredy was locked to the side of the steeple. He went to look at the small bouncing object as it passed him. But then it DID pass him, and he realized that he was looking down. And he refused to do THAT while he was up here.

"Dammit Fredy. You coulda caught that." Milo said, slightly exasperated. "Meh. It's alright. Probably just some tiny little bauble that a bird stowed up here."

The "bauble" fell for several seconds once it left the edge of the roof. It bounced off of one of the lower levels hard, then began falling once again.

It landed right on the corner of the stone wall that marked the border of the temple's side courtyard.

And it shattered.

Milo and his son Fredinar only had a split second to wonder why it had suddenly gotten so warm, even by the temple's standard.

Then there was a blinding light.

And then the capital city erupted into mayhem.

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James and Vickers were walking to the stables, crunching over the hard packed snow that had been beaten into a path between the two buildings. They'd both admitted that they hadn't been to see their mounts since they'd gotten back, so they'd decided to go see them. James could use a ride on Steve, the big lizard made a good sounding board when he needed to clear his head.

Suddenly everything went incredibly silent.

The snow to the left and right of them seemed to shrink suddenly, and James felt his feet get wet.

But that wasn't what told him that something was wrong.

"What the fuck?" He heard Vickers say from behind him as all of the magical senses that he'd been training with Veliry SCREAMED danger into his mind.

James turned and grabbed the large man by the shoulders and launched both of them through the air, jumping as hard as he could toward the castle wall only twenty yards to their right. They landed in a heap amid the rapidly melting snow and mud.

"What the fuck?!?!" Vickers exclaimed again as he rolled to his feet. But James slammed into him and tackled him the last few yards to the base of the wall.

There was a roar.

It was the single loudest thing James had ever heard in his life. The only thing he could think of that compared was when the bombs had gone off outside of Jadesport.

The wind whipped past them and the wall, in a maelstrom of debris and heat as James huddled at the base of the wall with Vickers.

One of the castle guards slammed into the ground a few feet to the left of them. James imagined that the wind must have blown him off of the wall while he was on patrol. Without even communicating, James and Vickers both crawled over and pulled him to the wall with them.

James looked over and saw the very highest part of the stables getting battered by wind, some of the thatching flying off in pieces.

The windows of the castle all shattered inward and James thought he could hear screams of shock. Or maybe he just imagined them. There was no way he could have heard that from this far away while all this wind was roaring past.

And then things became eerily quiet again.

"WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!" Vickers yelled for a third time. "DID WE JUST GET FUCKIN NUKED?!"

Then the wind began whipping back the other direction.

More thermos? James wondered. *No. No that's impossible. We would've heard them. Plus; why the fuck would they thermo the capital?*

"Stay here!" He yelled at Vickers. "I'll go find out!"

"Fuck no, we're getting inside!" Vickers replied as he tried to grab James.

But James was already in the air, his jump letting him scale the wall in a single bound. He grabbed the edge at the top and scrambled over. He rolled as the wind tried to pull him all the way past the wall and over the other side and slammed into the parapets. He held onto them as he regained his feet.

What he saw beyond them, out in the city, was the worst thing he could imagine being here. His eyes widened in shock as his heart began racing.

"Fire elemental." He whispered to himself. "No."

James didn't tell Vickers.

He didn't go to see how Steve was. He hadn't felt any pain anywhere, so he knew that the drake was uninjured.

He didn't even check on the injured, maybe even dead, guard that he and Vickers had pulled to safety.

He simply began running as fast as he could for the castle.

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Kela had been attending a meeting with the King and several of his advisors when the windows shattered.

She'd had a moment's notice that something was wrong. Her hair raised, poofing out in fear as every sense she had warned her of incoming danger.

"GET DOWN!" She yelled as she began to move.

She leapt at the King and tackled him to the ground just as the windows shattered and shards of glass began peppering everyone near them. Several of the pieces plinked off of her armor, and one sliced her neck on the left side as she smothered the King beneath her.

She grabbed the desk that the king had been sitting at and flipped it on its side while sliding it over closer to where it would cover them better.

After a few more moments the chaos dimmed and Kela raised up a bit.

"Your Majesty! Are you okay?" She asked.

King Farrick coughed and tried to spit out a bit of her fur that had ended up in his mouth.

"I'm-" He coughed. "I'm fine." He said. "What in the hells just happened?"

"I don't know." She admitted. "Something magical. And powerful. We need to get you to safety." She lifted her head up over the desk and signaled to several of the guards who looked like they'd recovered somewhat. "YOU THREE! WITH ME! ON THE KING!" She commanded.

Then she noticed the light coming from outside of the now broken windows.

She stood up, and as she did her legs shook.

"No. That's impossible." She said as she threw the desk aside, splintering it against the wall, and began walking forward. "Not here." She said. Then she scanned the buildings to the left and right. Those still standing. "Not there. Anywhere but there."

"Kela. What is it?" King Farrick asked as the three guards got to him and began helping him up. "IS THAT A BLOODY ELEMENTAL!??!"

Kela didn't hear him.

"Get him to the saferoom." She said in a voice that was calmer than she actually was. Her eyes never left the pillar of living fire that had erupted from the outer edge of the city. "King Farrick?" She asked, as she stared at it.

"What?" He asked as he struggled to stay and look out the window. "What are you doing? Scramble the defenses!"

"I need access to the relic treasury." She said as she finally looked away.

King Farrick froze, looking at her. He looked back out at the elemental, the guards no longer trying to usher him away as they realized what she'd asked.

He took a deep breath. His left arm began to glow with a dull mixture of green and blue swirling lights.

"Relic treasury access unlocked for all Royal Guards ranked Captain or higher." He said as he pressed his right hand to the glowing mark beneath his sleeve. "No limitations. Capital emergency."

"Thank you." She said as she began slowly walking out of the room.

"May the moon guide you." He whispered to her departing form. "And offer you mercy when it deems it so."

He signaled for the guards to stand down, then walked toward the shattered windows. His throat and hair began to glow with a bright gold light.

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He yelled, using the highest level of the Voice of Regal Authority he could cast to amplify his voice over the roar of the monster attacking his people. It hurt. He'd have a sore throat for weeks after this. He took a deep breath and continued.

"IF YOU ARE IN THE SOUTH-WEST SECTOR OF THE CITY, REPORT TO THE CASTLE FOR ORDERS! ALL GUARDS RANK CAPTAIN OR HIGHER MAKE WAY TO THE ROYAL RELIC TREASURY FOR EQUIPMENT! IF YOU ARE NOT A CITY GUARD! EVACUATE AS FAR AND AS FAST AS YOU ARE ABLE! HELP THOSE WHO CANNOT MOVE! AND IF YOU ARE ABLE TO FIGHT!"

He paused, and wheezed, he could feel his throat bleeding from the strain.

"FIGHT! FIGHT! FIIIIIIGGGGHHHTTT!!!"

He turned back to the guards and fell to his knees. He coughed and blood splattered on the floor in front of him. One of the guards rushed forward and held an amber glowing hand to his throat. Immediately it began to feel better. But after a moment he waved the guard away.

"Help these people." He ordered them. "Get them to the healing ward if they need it. Escort the rest to the cellars and dungeons. Then ready for battle."

"We need to get you to safety too your majesty." The one that had helped heal him said.

King Farrick stood up. He wobbled for a moment and one of the guards reached out to steady him.

"Didn't you just hear my orders lad?" He asked. The guards looked at him in confusion. "I just said for everyone Captain or higher to report for equipment." He wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth with his shirt sleeve. "Last time I checked; the King... is higher than a captain."

With that he left them standing there, and began walking the same direction as Kela.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vm9i4w/wait_is_this_just_gate_175/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (174/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vk8f96/wait_is_this_just_gate_173/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Told you I'd add one today. This might just be the longest chapter I've ever written. Also, I won't be posting it to r/GATEhouse *just yet. I'm not on my normal computer, so formatting is a pain in the ass. But I'll get it on there on Monday though.*

Til then, enjoy.

\~

Nguyen looked down the throat of the massive, dusky brown dragon as its mouth opened. It had countless, dagger sized, glass-like rows of teeth that would have made a T-Rex jealous. He could see a light beginning to build deep within that he knew meant his death.

He closed his eyes as he saw it begin to pull its head back. This was it. In a second, they'd all be a pile of ash and charred flesh on the edge of some random desert in a different universe than the one they'd been born in.

Suddenly there was a loud clanging noise from up above, and Nguyen felt the heat dissipate almost immediately.

"**Dusty! Knock it off!"** Said a gruff, slightly gravelly voice from somewhere above the dragon.

Nguyen opened his eyes slowly, not sure if he wanted to.

The dragon looked almost... sad?

Before he could register what was happening an armored head and shoulders popped up over the dragon's head. A hand appeared and opened the visor of the helmet.

"Who are you lot?" The person asked. Nguyen thought they might've been a dwarf, but he wouldn't know until he saw them standing up, assuming they weren't already. "And what are you doin' way out here in the Chill Dunes?" The rider asked.

"We're uh... we're researchers." Nguyen answered as he stood up. "Specifically, cartographers." He looked back and saw that Sticky was holding the fifty-caliber rifle aimed at the dragon's head in shaky hands as he lay on his back. Its bipod was resting on his shins. "May I ask who you are? And also, what you're doing out here as well?"

"Depends." Answered the dwarf. "Is that thing that ole shaky there is holding goin' to kill me or Dusty?"

"Not unless you or... Dusty... tries to kill us." Nguyen retorted.

"Well than go ahead and lower it." The rider replied. "We only came over to see who you are."

Nguyen signaled to Sticky. But Sticky was too focused on the dragon to see it.

"Sticky!" Nguyen hissed. "Drop it."

Sticky looked at him, unsure. Then, slowly, he lowered the weapon onto his chest and held his hands up.

Nguyen heard a slight thud, and looked back to see that the rider, he'd been right about them being a dwarf, had slid off of the dragon's neck and was now standing beside it.

"Go find yourself some breakfast ya big bag o' sand." He said as he gave the side of the dragon's neck a kick. "And not here."

Nguyen watched in fascination as the dragon looked at the small dwarf for a moment, then back at the party, then nuzzled the dwarf with its massive head, and turned to leave. A few moments, and a small sandstorm later, and it was in the air flying away.

Nguyen looked back at the dwarf, who held out his hand in greeting.

"Sherk Dunebasher. Nice to meet ya." He said as Nguyen took his arm in the local greeting shake. "Not too often Dusty and I see anyone out here. In fact, basically never. Now tell me, why are a bunch of cartographers mapping this desolate place? It aint changed in... gods... a couple of millennia at least."

\---

"That's it boy." Milo said as he tied his secondary anchor rope to one of the anchor points that were on the steeple and undid his first one so he could move up some more. "Just like that, you're doin fine."

Fredy was about ten feet lower on the roof and slowly moving his way up the angled tiles, shaking like a leaf. He didn't respond as he moved his next anchor rope into its position, right where Milo had put one of his.

"Another fifteen feet and I'll be at the spine." Milo said as he repeated the anchor switching process. "Then I'll help you out by pulling the tether. Few feet later and we'll be on the higher part of the steeple. Easy after that."

Fredy continued to not respond. He was focused on simply putting one foot in front of, and higher than, the other. That, and making sure his anchor ropes were properly placed.

Milo watched him for a moment. He knew his son was more scared than he'd ever been in his life. Probably even more scared than he'd been when he was standing outside of the Briarton's house with a bundle of flowers so he could ask little Meri Briarton to allow him to court her.

Indeed, Milo couldn't help but be proud of his son for toughing this out. Especially since he knew that young Fredy was only doing it to make him happy.

"Good. Good. Keep going." He said as he watched. "Look out for that dark tile a few feet ahead of you. When I stepped on it, it felt kind of-" Suddenly his lead foot slipped on a loose tile of its own. He began sliding down the roof on his stomach.

"PA!" Fredy yelled. Without realizing it he dashed forward to help his father, only stopping when his anchor lines snapped taut. "FATHER!" He yelled.

But Milo was fine. His own anchor lines had stopped him only a few feet lower than he'd been when his foot had slipped. He pushed himself up and grabbed at the leg of a statue that one of the lines was still tied to.

"See." He said with a large smile. "Even if you do screw up. We've worked out the kinks. I'm fine boy. Just got a bruised ego for lookin' a fool. " He made a show of dusting off his knee, which he wouldn't admit actually hurt quite a bit now. It'd bruise for sure. "And look at you. Damn near runnin' up here to save me."

"I'd thought you'd fallen." Fredy said as he caught his breath and clamped back down on the side of the steeple.

"Nah." Milo countered. He shuffled his way back up to where he'd been and bent down to inspect the tile. "I'm fine." He pulled the tile loose to see if the wood underneath was rotten. If it was he'd have to tell the temple priests so they could get it looked at.

It came off easily, with a slight squelch. *Sure enough.* He thought. *Timber's bad. Priests won't be happy about that. Not in the house of warmth and comfort.*

As the tile popped off something shiny and red popped out with it. It clinked and bounced as it slid down the tiled roof. It looked almost like a dark red ruby.

"Say what's that?" Milo asked as it bounced downward. "Grab it boy."

But Fredy was locked to the side of the steeple. He went to look at the small bouncing object as it passed him. But then it DID pass him, and he realized that he was looking down. And he refused to do THAT while he was up here.

"Dammit Fredy. You coulda caught that." Milo said, slightly exasperated. "Meh. It's alright. Probably just some tiny little bauble that a bird stowed up here."

The "bauble" fell for several seconds once it left the edge of the roof. It bounced off of one of the lower levels hard, then began falling once again.

It landed right on the corner of the stone wall that marked the border of the temple's side courtyard.

And it shattered.

Milo and his son Fredinar only had a split second to wonder why it had suddenly gotten so warm, even by the temple's standard.

Then there was a blinding light.

And then the capital city erupted into mayhem.

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James and Vickers were walking to the stables, crunching over the hard packed snow that had been beaten into a path between the two buildings. They'd both admitted that they hadn't been to see their mounts since they'd gotten back, so they'd decided to go see them. James could use a ride on Steve, the big lizard made a good sounding board when he needed to clear his head.

Suddenly everything went incredibly silent.

The snow to the left and right of them seemed to shrink suddenly, and James felt his feet get wet.

But that wasn't what told him that something was wrong.

"What the fuck?" He heard Vickers say from behind him as all of the magical senses that he'd been training with Veliry SCREAMED danger into his mind.

James turned and grabbed the large man by the shoulders and launched both of them through the air, jumping as hard as he could toward the castle wall only twenty yards to their right. They landed in a heap amid the rapidly melting snow and mud.

"What the fuck?!?!" Vickers exclaimed again as he rolled to his feet. But James slammed into him and tackled him the last few yards to the base of the wall.

There was a roar.

It was the single loudest thing James had ever heard in his life. The only thing he could think of that compared was when the bombs had gone off outside of Jadesport.

The wind whipped past them and the wall, in a maelstrom of debris and heat as James huddled at the base of the wall with Vickers.

One of the castle guards slammed into the ground a few feet to the left of them. James imagined that the wind must have blown him off of the wall while he was on patrol. Without even communicating, James and Vickers both crawled over and pulled him to the wall with them.

James looked over and saw the very highest part of the stables getting battered by wind, some of the thatching flying off in pieces.

The windows of the castle all shattered inward and James thought he could hear screams of shock. Or maybe he just imagined them. There was no way he could have heard that from this far away while all this wind was roaring past.

And then things became eerily quiet again.

"WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!" Vickers yelled for a third time. "DID WE JUST GET FUCKIN NUKED?!"

Then the wind began whipping back the other direction.

More thermos? James wondered. *No. No that's impossible. We would've heard them. Plus; why the fuck would they thermo the capital?*

"Stay here!" He yelled at Vickers. "I'll go find out!"

"Fuck no, we're getting inside!" Vickers replied as he tried to grab James.

But James was already in the air, his jump letting him scale the wall in a single bound. He grabbed the edge at the top and scrambled over. He rolled as the wind tried to pull him all the way past the wall and over the other side and slammed into the parapets. He held onto them as he regained his feet.

What he saw beyond them, out in the city, was the worst thing he could imagine being here. His eyes widened in shock as his heart began racing.

"Fire elemental." He whispered to himself. "No."

James didn't tell Vickers.

He didn't go to see how Steve was. He hadn't felt any pain anywhere, so he knew that the drake was uninjured.

He didn't even check on the injured, maybe even dead, guard that he and Vickers had pulled to safety.

He simply began running as fast as he could for the castle.

\---

Kela had been attending a meeting with the King and several of his advisors when the windows shattered.

She'd had a moment's notice that something was wrong. Her hair raised, poofing out in fear as every sense she had warned her of incoming danger.

"GET DOWN!" She yelled as she began to move.

She leapt at the King and tackled him to the ground just as the windows shattered and shards of glass began peppering everyone near them. Several of the pieces plinked off of her armor, and one sliced her neck on the left side as she smothered the King beneath her.

She grabbed the desk that the king had been sitting at and flipped it on its side while sliding it over closer to where it would cover them better.

After a few more moments the chaos dimmed and Kela raised up a bit.

"Your Majesty! Are you okay?" She asked.

King Farrick coughed and tried to spit out a bit of her fur that had ended up in his mouth.

"I'm-" He coughed. "I'm fine." He said. "What in the hells just happened?"

"I don't know." She admitted. "Something magical. And powerful. We need to get you to safety." She lifted her head up over the desk and signaled to several of the guards who looked like they'd recovered somewhat. "YOU THREE! WITH ME! ON THE KING!" She commanded.

Then she noticed the light coming from outside of the now broken windows.

She stood up, and as she did her legs shook.

"No. That's impossible." She said as she threw the desk aside, splintering it against the wall, and began walking forward. "Not here." She said. Then she scanned the buildings to the left and right. Those still standing. "Not there. Anywhere but there."

"Kela. What is it?" King Farrick asked as the three guards got to him and began helping him up. "IS THAT A BLOODY ELEMENTAL!??!"

Kela didn't hear him.

"Get him to the saferoom." She said in a voice that was calmer than she actually was. Her eyes never left the pillar of living fire that had erupted from the outer edge of the city. "King Farrick?" She asked, as she stared at it.

"What?" He asked as he struggled to stay and look out the window. "What are you doing? Scramble the defenses!"

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vm9grf/wait_is_this_just_gate_175/)

Wait, is this just GATE?(173/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vj6a2b/wait_is_this_just_gate_172/)

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"So how far did you end up going?" Vickers asked before he shoveled some of his breakfast into his mouth in the dining hall. "Took you a long time to get back."

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"Couldn't have been more than a few minutes." James replied. "Maybe five... ten tops."

Vickers thought about that for a moment, calculating in his head. His eyes widened. "Dude.... What?"

"What?" James asked.

"That can't be right." Vickers said in response. "Either you're overestimating the distance, or you're underestimating the time. There's no way you went that far that fast. That's.... hundreds of miles per hour."

"Really?" James asked. "That can't be right."

"Come on man, you're a nurse. Or nurse student. If you can do beats per minutes than you can calculate miles per hour." Vickers countered. "Think about it. Let's say you only went fifteen miles, and that it took you ten minutes. The slower threshold you gave me. Do the math real quick."

James thought about it for a moment, relating the minutes to seconds so he could put it into the BPM frame that Vickers had proposed.

"That's still... ninety miles per hour." James said after a moment. "That.... actually sounds about right."

"Seriously?" Vickers asked.

"Dude." James said with raised eyebrows. "I think it may have been faster. I was struggling to turn my head. Veliry couldn't even keep up with me. Felt like my hair, lips, and ears were getting ripped off by the wind. It was hard to do anything other than go forward."

"Shit man." Vickers said. And if it was the other side of the equation. Twenty miles in five miles.... give or take." He shook his head. "That's like... what two hundred fifty-ish. Give or take based on how accurate you were on the numbers." He pointed at James. "You gotta teach me that shit."

James stabbed his fork into a piece of eggs. "Yeah. Good luck with that man." He said as he lifted the fork. "I think Werner'll castrate me if I try doin' that shit again."

"At least teach me how to make explosions man." Vickers said with a somewhat pleading tone. "Can you imagine how my punches would be? It'd be awesome."

"Pretty sure I'm still not allowed to teach you magic." James said as he sipped his cup of coffee. He couldn't help but notice that the cooks had gotten much better at making the lovely concoction.

\----------

"He's growing more powerful." Kela said calmly as she looked over the troops training in the courtyard.

"Position two!" Amina yelled, ignoring Kela, as she ordered the soldiers below to their next formation.

"We knew he would once he began unlocking his magical potential." Kela continued. "He proved how deadly he could be before he'd even left the summoning room that first time." She said as she absently rubbed her chest, as if remembering the three bullet holes. "And the way he could run. The fight with the clan."

"I know." Amina said finally.

It was true too. She'd known it ever since seeing him face Steve in the bonding cage.

James was strong.

Not physically. At least not compared to other people. There were lots of people stronger than her fiance. Vickers, Alixan, hell even Kraug was significantly stronger.

She couldn't fool herself into thinking he was wise either. If anything James was a bit of a fool. Constantly making absolutely insane, uninformed, and it seemed deadly decisions. There were times when she couldn't tell if he was lucky, or if maybe the gods HADN'T abandoned this world. Maybe they were lending him their favor. Though she had reasons to doubt the latter.

James was strong because he was stubborn. And because he also seemed to be right on the border of insanity.

The last part wasn't something Amina typically considered a positive trait. Especially not in her love life.

But James's insanity only seemed to kick in when it was... not necessary. That wasn't the right word. No. It felt more accurate to say that it only kicked in at times when it would allow him to... transform himself. To become more capable of surviving this world.

"He's truly beginning to resemble his title." Kela said, interrupting Amina's ruminations about her soon to be husband. "I mean. He already was. But flying with explosions? Over the city? He's already being spoken of by bards across the land. His legend is growing even as his people scold him for his idiocy."

Amina glanced at her, trying not to think of how she'd scolded him too. "Position three!" She yelled at the soldiers below. "Anti cavalry variant!" The soldiers shifted to the modified version of the formation.

"Vickers will likely see similar growth... eventually." Kela continued. "Luckily he seems to not be as hostile as we'd expected." She bristled a little. "The ambassador though."

"You said you smell a sickness on her." Amina said, glad for the change of subject.

"Yes. It's.... odd." Kela replied. "Like the scent of the flesh rot. But... not. It's something different. Something deeper. I've never smelled anything quite like it. The flesh rot is just the CLOSEST comparison I can think of."

"Position six! Mobile! East!" Amina commanded. She looked down. "James isn't an issue. He was supposed to be a hero, and he's becoming one. Or already was one." She said, unsure. "Vickers might still be one. And the ambassador definitely seems like she is. But not James. He's just fulfilling his role."

"I know." Kela said simply. "But you know the problem with heroes. Summoned or otherwise. Let's hope he's different in that regard"

"He has been in all the other ways." Amina said, before leaning on the railing. "Position one!" She yelled, as she considered the implied warning.

\---------------

"See Fredy." Milo said as he pulled a bottle of warm cider from his bag and handed it to his son. "Not so bad of a climb. And look at this view."

"Y-Yeah. Sure thing pa. Great view." Fredy said in a shaking voice.

"Take a minute lad." Milo said as he opened his own bottle. "We can take a moment to relax before we go up any further."

"Not sure I'm gonna be able to relax up here pa." Fredy replied. "Can we just get this over with?"

Milo looked at his sone with just a bit of shock. Then he began pulling the ropes and harnesses from his bag. "Sure. You sure you're ready?"

"I don't think I'll ever be ready for this. But Id rather just get it done and then get home. Ma promised Gricken pie when we got done."

"Well then. Guess we should hurry up and hope she keeps her word." Milo said with a laugh. "She always has before."

With that he tied the first of the knots on the eastern pillar of the steeple while Fredy began putting on his harness.

"Do as I say." Milo said as he looped the rope through Fredy's harness loop. "And watch your footing. It's been years since these roof tiles have been replaced. Lot of em are loose."

"Great." Fredy said sarcastically. "That makes me feel way more confident about this."

"You'll be fine." Milo said with a smile. "Been up here seven times now. And my pa did this job over fifteen times before he retired. Never had any issues." He gave the rope and harness a quick tug. "There. That's not goin' anywhere you don't want it to."

A few moments later and they were both clambering up the side of the steeple.

\----------------------

"EVERYONE TAKE COVER!" Nguyen yelled as he grabbed his shield and his halberd from the bundle of gear stacked up next to his tent.

All around him, the remaining members of the party scrambled to do similarly. Grabbing gear or hunkering down behind rocks and what little cover there was in the part of the desert they'd set up camp in.

In the desert below a large cloud of sand marked the passage of the massive dragon.

It was heading right for them.

"Boss." Sergeant Cassandra Heintz grunted as she took up a spot behind the same rock formation Nguyen had taken station behind. "This seems kind of dire."

"No shit heintz." Nguyen snapped.

"Be nice to have a rifle or two." Heintz added.

"Yeah. Yeah it would."

"Shame we had to get rid of them all." She continued.

"Yeah. It really sucks that our cover was blown, and we had to pop smoke and scramble." He agreed.

"Sooo...." She began. "What would the article fifteen look like if someone.... hadn't?" She asked.

Nguyen looked at her with a combination of anger and shock.

"Whatre you tryi'ng to say Sergeant.?" Nguyen asked.

"Oh.... just that we might just have a firearm still in our possession." She said with a shrug. She peeked her head over the rock. The dragon was only a mile away now. Mere moments based on its flight speed. "Just. You know. Theoretically."

Nguyen stared at her. Eyes unblinking. The former drill sergeant in him wanted to skull drag her across the desert and throw her at the approaching dragon.

But the idea of having a rifle, any rifle, right now?

Well, it had a certain appeal.

He made his decision.

"Sergeant Heintz. If you have a rifle at your disposal. Now would be a good fuckin time to get it, and potentially save all of our asses." He glared. "If you don't; then I'm gonna have you digging every latrine the forces of Earth ever need in this fucking universe. Just for fucking with me."

"No articles?" She asked with a grin.

"Get the fucking rifle sergeant." He hissed.

Heintz called over to one of the other groups of huddled, hiding, people behind a bush.

"Hey Sticky!" She half yelled. "Go get the thing!"

"What?" Specialist Diego "Sticky" Franklin called back. "Hell no. I aint gettin' hung out."

"I already got clearance from the boss. Go get it. That's an order!" She yelled back.

Sticky grunted and shook his head. Then he quickly scampered over to his tent and began rummaging through one of the few bottomless bags they had managed to get their hands on. After a moment he produced the greatest thing MSG Nguyen had ever seen.

It was the anti-materiel rifle that Isaacs had brought over as his preferred weapon.

"You guys saved that thing?" He asked Heintz. "I thought I ordered you guys to destroy all of them."

"Isaacs threw a shit fit." Heintz replied. "Complain after this thing is dealt with."

"If we live that long." Nguyen shot back as Sticky ran over to them.

He froze only a few steps away. He was looking over the rock that Nguyen and Heintz were hiding behind.

Nguyen didn't need anyone to say anything. The shadow cast over them, and the sand blowing around them both told him why Sticky had frozen.

Nguyen turned to look over the rock.

The air around them began to grow hot. As if he had just opened the doors to one of the evaporator sheds that he'd been tasked with guarding back when he'd just been a young corporal.

"I'll write up the articles for both o' ya on the other side." He said as the creature's maw began to open.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vlz2am/wait_is_this_just_gate_174/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (173/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vj67an/wait_is_this_just_gate_172/) /
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"What?" James asked.

"That can't be right." Vickers said in response. "Either you're overestimating the distance, or you're underestimating the time. There's no way you went that far that fast. That's.... hundreds of miles per hour."

"Really?" James asked. "That can't be right."

"Come on man, you're a nurse. Or nurse student. If you can do beats per minutes than you can calculate miles per hour." Vickers countered. "Think about it. Let's say you only went fifteen miles, and that it took you ten minutes. The slower threshold you gave me. Do the math real quick."

James thought about it for a moment, relating the minutes to seconds so he could put it into the BPM frame that Vickers had proposed.

"That's still... ninety miles per hour." James said after a moment. "That.... actually sounds about right."

"Seriously?" Vickers asked.

"Dude." James said with raised eyebrows. "I think it may have been faster. I was struggling to turn my head. Veliry couldn't even keep up with me. Felt like my hair, lips, and ears were getting ripped off by the wind. It was hard to do anything other than go forward."

"Shit man." Vickers said. "And if it was the other side of the equation. Twenty miles in five minutes.... give or take." He shook his head. "That's like... what two hundred fifty-ish. Give or take based on how accurate you were on the numbers." He pointed at James. "You gotta teach me that shit."

James stabbed his fork into a piece of eggs. "Yeah. Good luck with that man." He said as he lifted the fork. "I think Werner'll castrate me if I try doin' that shit again."

"At least teach me how to make explosions man." Vickers said with a somewhat pleading tone. "Can you imagine how my punches would be? It'd be awesome."

"Pretty sure I'm still not allowed to teach you magic." James said as he sipped his cup of coffee. He couldn't help but notice that the cooks had gotten much better at making the lovely concoction.

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"He's growing more powerful." Kela said calmly as she looked over the troops training in the courtyard.

"Position two!" Amina yelled, ignoring Kela, as she ordered the soldiers below to their next formation.

"We knew he would once he began unlocking his magical potential." Kela continued. "He proved how deadly he could be before he'd even left the summoning room that first time." She said as she absently rubbed her chest, as if remembering the three bullet holes. "And the way he could run. The fight with the clan."

"I know." Amina said finally.

It was true too. She'd known it ever since seeing him face Steve in the bonding cage.

James was strong.

Not physically. At least not compared to other people. There were lots of people stronger than her fiance. Vickers, Alixan, hell even Kraug was significantly stronger.

She couldn't fool herself into thinking he was wise either. If anything James was a bit of a fool. Constantly making absolutely insane, uninformed, and it seemed deadly decisions. There were times when she couldn't tell if he was lucky, or if maybe the gods HADN'T abandoned this world. Maybe they were lending him their favor. Though she had reasons to doubt the latter.

James was strong because he was stubborn. And because he also seemed to be right on the border of insanity.

The last part wasn't something Amina typically considered a positive trait. Especially not in her love life.

But James's insanity only seemed to kick in when it was... not necessary. That wasn't the right word. No. It felt more accurate to say that it only

kicked in at times when it would allow him to... transform himself. To become more capable of surviving this world.

"He's truly beginning to resemble his title." Kela said, interrupting Amina's ruminations about her soon to be husband. "I mean. He already was. But flying with explosions? Over the city? He's already being spoken of by bards across the land. His legend is growing even as his people scold him for his idiocy."

Amina glanced at her, trying not to think of how she'd scolded him too. "Position three!" She yelled at the soldiers below. "Anti cavalry variant!" The soldiers shifted to the modified version of the formation.

"Vickers will likely see similar growth... eventually." Kela continued. "Luckily he seems to not be as hostile as we'd expected." She bristled a little. "The ambassador though."

"You said you smell a sickness on her." Amina said, glad for the change of subject.

"Yes. It's.... odd." Kela replied. "Like the scent of the flesh rot. But... not. It's something different. Something deeper. I've never smelled anything quite like it. The flesh rot is just the CLOSEST comparison I can think of."

"Position six! Mobile! East!" Amina commanded. She looked down. "James isn't an issue. He was supposed to be a hero, and he's becoming one. Or already was one." She said, unsure. "Vickers might still be a threat. And the ambassador definitely seems like she is. But not James. He's just fulfilling his role."

"I know." Kela said simply. "But you know the problem with heroes. Summoned or otherwise. Let's hope he's different in that regard"

"He has been in all the other ways." Amina said, before leaning on the railing. "Position one!" She yelled, as she considered the implied warning.

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"See Fredy." Milo said as he pulled a bottle of warm cider from his bag and handed it to his son. "Not so bad of a climb. And look at this view."

"Y-Yeah. Sure thing pa. Great view." Fredy said in a shaking voice.

"Take a minute lad." Milo said as he opened his own bottle. "We can take a moment to relax before we go up any further."

"Not sure I'm gonna be able to relax up here pa." Fredy replied. "Can we just get this over with?"

Milo looked at his sone with just a bit of shock. Then he began pulling the ropes and harnesses from his bag. "Sure. You sure you're ready?"

"I don't think I'll ever be ready for this. But Id rather just get it done and then get home. Ma promised Gricken pie when we got done."

"Well then. Guess we should hurry up and hope she keeps her word." Milo said with a laugh. "She always has before."

With that he tied the first of the knots on the eastern pillar of the steeple while Fredy began putting on his harness.

"Do as I say." Milo said as he looped the rope through Fredy's harness loop. "And watch your footing. It's been years since these roof tiles have been replaced. Lot of em are loose."

"Great." Fredy said sarcastically. "That makes me feel way more confident about this."

"You'll be fine." Milo said with a smile. "Been up here seven times now. And my pa did this job over fifteen times before he retired. Never had any issues." He gave the rope and harness a quick tug. "There. That's not goin' anywhere you don't want it to."

A few moments later and they were both clambering up the side of the steeple.

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"EVERYONE TAKE COVER!" Nguyen yelled as he grabbed his shield and his halberd from the bundle of gear stacked up next to his tent.

All around him, the remaining members of the party scrambled to do similarly. Grabbing gear or hunkering down behind rocks and what little cover there was in the part of the desert they'd set up camp in.

In the desert below a large cloud of sand marked the passage of the massive dragon.

It was heading right for them.

"Boss." Sergeant Cassandra Heintz grunted as she took up a spot behind the same rock formation Nguyen had taken station behind. "This seems kind of dire."

"No shit heintz." Nguyen snapped.

"Be nice to have a rifle or two." Heintz added.

"Yeah. Yeah it would."

"Shame we had to get rid of them all." She continued.

"Yeah. It really sucks that our cover was blown, and we had to pop smoke and scramble." He agreed.

"Sooo...." She began. "What would the article fifteen look like if someone.... hadn't?" She asked.

Nguyen looked at her with a combination of anger and shock.

"Whatre you tryi'ng to say Sergeant.?" Nguyen asked.

"Oh.... just that we might just have a firearm still in our possession." She said with a shrug. She peeked her head over the rock. The dragon was only a mile away now. Mere moments based on its flight speed. "Just. You know. Theoretically."

Nguyen stared at her. Eyes unblinking. The former drill sergeant in him wanted to skull drag her across the desert and throw her at the approaching dragon.

But the idea of having a rifle, any rifle, right now?

Well, it had a certain appeal.

He made his decision.

"Sergeant Heintz. If you have a rifle at your disposal. Now would be a good fuckin time to get it, and potentially save all of our asses." He glared. "If you don't; then I'm gonna have you digging every latrine the forces of Earth ever need in this fucking universe. Just for fucking with me."

"No articles?" She asked with a grin.

"Get the fucking rifle sergeant." He hissed.

Heintz called over to one of the other groups of huddled, hiding, people behind a bush.

"Hey Sticky!" She half yelled. "Go get the thing!"

"What?" Specialist Diego "Sticky" Franklin called back. "Hell no. I aint gettin' hung out."

"I already got clearance from the boss. Go get it. That's an order!" She yelled back.

Sticky grunted and shook his head. Then he quickly scampered over to his tent and began rummaging through one of the few bottomless bags they had managed to get their hands on. After a moment he produced the greatest thing MSG Nguyen had ever seen.

It was the anti-materiel rifle that Isaacs had brought over as his preferred weapon.

"You guys saved that thing?" He asked Heintz. "I thought I ordered you guys to destroy all of them."

"Isaacs threw a shit fit." Heintz replied. "Complain after this thing is dealt with."

"If we live that long." Nguyen shot back as Sticky ran over to them.

He froze only a few steps away. He was looking over the rock that Nguyen and Heintz were hiding behind.

Nguyen didn't need anyone to say anything. The shadow cast over them, and the sand blowing around them both told him why Sticky had frozen.

Nguyen turned to look over the rock.

The air around them began to grow hot. As if he had just opened the doors to one of the evaporator sheds that he'd been tasked with guarding back when he'd just been a young corporal.

"I'll write up the articles for both o' ya on the other side." He said as the creature's maw began to open.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (172/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Just imagine James yelling "DEKUUUU!!!" but not angry.

Enjoy!

\~

"**WHOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!"** James whooped as he flew through the air under his own power from the first explosion.

Holy shit! It fucking worked! He thought as he arced through the sky. *I'm actually flying. Or blasting off or whatever you'd call this.* Then he noticed his angle changing back downward and began the second part of the attempt.

He tucked his arms and legs, moving them forward as he did, and rolled forward. As he did this he also focused on the same thought that he'd used to get the first blast to work.

Not like an exploding flamethrower or a grenade. You're not a grenadier. You're a pistol guy. A gunslinger with magic in his mind. Become the bullet. His feet began to glow again. *Gunpowder in your feet. A full metal jacket in a gun barrel.*

As he reached the angle he wanted he extended himself back out, let the energy build up just a bit more, then released the spell.

BOOM!

Another explosion expanded from the base of his feet. No larger than the explosion of a standard frag grenade, but with a directional charge like a missile impacting its target.

Newton took the wheel again.

James rocketed back up into the sky again, even faster this time. But also at a slightly different angle than he'd wanted. It wasn't a bad thing, he was at least a hundred feet off of the ground so he wasn't exactly gonna hit anything. Not unless a griffin or dragon rider got in the way, but he didn't see any of them in the sky right now. So it was just something to note so that he could refine the technique.

As he rolled a second time he looked back toward the castle.

Only two blasts and I have to be at least a mile away now. He realized. *Goddam. I might be faster than a griffin. I wonder if Veliry would be able to keep up with me?*

As if she'd read his mind Veliry spoke up from his left side.

"James what the hells!" She yelled, causing him to flounder in the air for a moment before recovering his gun and powder based spell focused thoughts again.

"BACK UP!" He yelled. But Veliry was almost a hundred yards away. She'd used a spell to amplify her voice.

BOOOOOOM!

Another, larger explosion propelled him forward, even higher and faster than the last one. He was getting better at the explosions now. But a downside was that the he was moving so fast that the wind was starting to hurt his face. He squinted his eyes shut to try and stop them from watering. His hair, still too long to be "in regs" was whipping at his face and ears painfully.

"James!" Veliry said from his right side this time. She sounded like she was straining. "What?" A pause, James looked to the side she was on and saw her flying a few dozen yards behind him, her face stern with concentration on her flight spell. "What are you doing!?!" She yelled, her throat glowing to let him hear her.

James fought to point his head back forward. He angled his eyes down ward as he did and realized that he was over farmland now, well outside of the city. *God. How far have I gone? Oh boy, this may be a problem.*

"FFFFFFFllllying." He forced out of his mouth, which strained to shut once it was open to speak. His bottom lip felt like it was on the verge of being ripped off.

Ohhhhh I need to stop. He realized with dismay. *Probably should've planned for that. Oh god I'm a dumbass. Okay, how do I do this?*

James initiated another roll, although he didn't think he was on a downward trajectory yet.

Okay. Smaller bullets. Twenty twos instead of forty fives. Can I do one foot only? Maybe alternate feet rapidly? Wait.... If I stop I drop.

"FFfffuuuuuucckck." He said to himself.

He got to the rear and slightly downward angle he wanted, he was upside down and effectively looking up into the sky.

Right foot first. Should I shield myself? He wondered. He noticed Veliry a long ways away now, her flight spell unable to keep up with his blast speed. *Fuck it.* He thought. *Die motherfucker die.*

POPOPOPOPOPOP-BANG-POP POP POP

He sagged from the unexpected G-forces acting against the rest of his body. His legs began to ache as though he was carrying significantly more weight than even his magically infused body could handle as the series of rapid, alternating, blasts emanated from his feet. They sounded like the LMG's he'd imagined in his mind. Veliry flew past his former position in a blur before she'd realized what had happened.

BANG!

He misfired one of the shots with his left foot and propelled himself downward and into a spin.

FUCK! He thought as he fought to control himself.

By pure instinct his hands shot out and blasted the first spell he'd ever managed to cast. Twin jets of high pressure air, like high power air hoses, blasted from his hands. He fought for a moment to realign his arms and get them to stop the spiral he was in.

When he finally got himself moving in a single direction, and not five at once, he realized that he was much closer to the ground than he had been a few moments before. Luckily he was moving much slower now.

But that also made his spin a lot harder to pull off in time.

He saw a barn with a thatched roof only a few hundred yards away.

"Better than nothing!" He yelled to himself.

James brought his right leg forward as if he was trying to kick something that was above his head, his knee tucked up against his chest. He suddenly became very glad that he'd stretched before doing this.

FWO-BOOOM!

The blast made him feel like he'd kicked himself in the chest. And he realized that with his leg in the position it had been, he probably had.

Once again he was spinning. But he was ready this time. His hands shot out and began blasting air out again.

He stabilized just in time to slam into the thatched roof he'd seen before.

Despite the massive amount of straw that the roof was made of, it still had solid wood underneath it.

James hit the roof like a cannon shot. Fitting really, considering how he'd been propelling himself.

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Slap slap slap. James felt something impacting his cheek.

"Oi! Lad! You alive?" Said a scratchy voice as the person who owned it slapped him a few more times.

James slowly opened his eyes. He was looking back up at the sky, and for just a moment thought that he was still in the air.

Then his body reminded him of the truth.

"Ow." He said weakly.

"Thank the gods." He heard Veliry say.

Suddenly a hand latched onto his ear and pulled him up off the straw covered ground.

"Aaaaah!" He yelped. "What the hell?"

Veliry was standing in front of him, wearing what James had to assume was her nightgown. She had his ear in a vice grip and was wrenching it backwards. She was short enough that James was on his knees from the hold.

"LET GO!" He yelled.

"WHAT IN THE HELLS WERE YOU THINKING JAMES!" She yelled back. "FLYING FOR THE FIRST TIME WITHOUT ANYONE TO SPOT YOU? AND WITH THOSE DAMNED EXPLOSIONS?! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU???"

"I just wanted to see if it could work!" He exclaimed as she continued twisting his ear.

"YOU COULD HAVE KILLED YOURSELF!" She answered. "HELLS, YOU ALMOST DID!"

"And you scared my grickens and blew up me hatchery roof!" Added the voice from before. James looked with one eye, the other still wincing from the pain in his ear, and everywhere else. The voice belonged to an elderly half dwarf with gray, balding hair.

"AND YOU BLEW UP THIS POOR MAN'S FARM!" Veliry added.

"Ssssorry." James grunted. "I can at least fix that part." He looked back forward. "Vel, you gotta let go for a second."

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"I'm so sorry." He said as he lifted himself up on his hands. "That was way too much spinning." He gagged, then fell back down and lost some more of his supper from the night before.

"I'll.... fetch you two some water and towels." Said the farmer. "At least you've provided a meal to the grickens. They love some sick." He said before beating a hasty retreat, his hand over his mouth.

"James." Veliry said with a stone face. "I'm going to turn you into a lounge chair."

James rolled over onto his back, away from his mess.

"Worth it." He said as he began gently unlatching his armor, some of which was already half broken off. "I'm goddam Elton John up in this bitch." He said to himself.

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INTONIGHT'SEPISODE!

The King reenacts the Star Wars prequel scenes about trade agreements. Werner has an aneurysm. And James forgets his boots.

\~

"On the matter of basic human rights as pertaining to all Earth citizens originating from the United States of America." King Farrick said to the camera on the Communication hub. "As amended on the subjects of food and water rights. We find these terms agreeable, and aligning almost entirely with our own ideals pertaining to basic rights." He finished while making a show of signing the stack of paper representing what was effectively James's Bill of Rights. One signature was in the Petravian language, the other in Earth English like James had helped him figure out. Then a royal seal was placed with a bit of wax and a press of the King's ring.

James subtly winked at Amina, who sat across from him. The two of them had found several loopholes which would have allowed anyone from Earth to stockpile fresh water. How they would do that wasn't outlined, but James had a couple ideas. King Farrick sat at the head of the table, with the hub on the end opposite of him so that its camera could see everyone at the table. Werner sat on the king's left hand side, with James next and Vickers last on their side. Amina sat opposite of Werner, followed by Marcos, Kela, and finally Artair, who was visibly bored.

On the screen of the Communication hub stood General Krick, flanked on each side by Secretary Grant and Colonel Muhhamed. James was somewhat confused by Grant taking the back seat. But that was above his pay grade. If the King was confused by it, then he didn't show it.

"We have decided to postpone signing your trade agreement for now, as you know." The King continued. "As we discussed before, we will have to determine the inherent values of various goods and services in relation to the gold standard that we've agreed to use until a more concise way can be determined." He held out his hand and Marcos handed him a scroll that the King held up for display. "We have here a list of our most commonly traded goods, as well as several of our more highly priced goods. Or at least the ones that the Ambassador here confirmed, would have parallels on your world. We can read them off now if you'd like, or we can simply save them for the camera later." King Farrick finished.

"We can save that for later your majesty." General Krick replied. "We've likewise compiled a similar list with the help of Captain Choi and Chief Vickers, who have both gotten a pretty decent bit of experience with your country's economy." He tapped a command into his interface and the document popped up on the communication hub. "It should help us get the math figured out and we should be able to move forward in a more economically sound fashion."

King Farrick nodded and handed the scroll back to Marcos.

"Moving on to the matter of Earth based military intervention in times of emergency." King Farrick said as he moved the affair forward. "We do have a few amendments we'd like on this, hopefully they are agreeable."

This was hour three of the meeting so far. James had felt both bored and incredibly out of his depth while listening to the two leaders. It was going to be another hour before they took a one hour break for lunch.

James was considering going AWOL after that. He couldn't handle listening to any more of the legal Kung Fu going on much longer.

But he had a feeling that Amina would kill him if he abandoned her here.

He fought back a yawn as the King and the General continued.

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Werner walked quickly back to the office to store the copies of the signed documents that the King's people had given her. Vickers quietly

walked behind her as she went over the meeting in her head. Despite having read his file, and having had a rather long conversation with him about Choi, she still couldn't read the SEAL. His face had been completely blank throughout the entire delegation. He'd barely even moved unless he'd been spoken to directly. The only sign that he'd even been alive had been the occasional blink.

But it turned out that he wasn't nearly as much of a mystery to her as Choi had become.

It had been obvious throughout the meeting that Choi had given the King, or more realistically the Princess, inside information on what to look out for in the various legal agreements. Almost every loophole had been sealed shut, or at the very least tightened to almost nonexistence. She knew that as a royal court the King had to have numerous retainers whose jobs it was to check for such things. But the thoroughness of their checks had been startling.

And the little shit of a captain had NOT been as subtle as he'd thought while he'd sat at the table. She'd caught the glances and winks and other little signals that Choi had given the princess showing how satisfied he was that those loopholes had been caught. How he'd helped them catch them she didn't know. As far as his records went he would have had no experiences with the legal system, at least outside of a court martial he'd gotten in his second year in the Army. And that was military justice, not international, or rather inter-dimensional, politics.

As she walked she typed a message on her phone and sent it to the Earth-side.

>Does Choi have any experience with the legal system that isn't in his file? If not, does his mother or any of his close family?

She thought back to the conversation she'd had with him after his return from Jadesport. She'd known then that he would resist the new changes to how things worked with her being here. She'd expected rebellion.

But this was on the verge of sedition. And that had not been what she'd expected of him.

To help another government counteract the U.S.'s attempts at gaining a foothold in this world? That was the kind of thing that would get you black-vanned back on Earth.

She stopped as she thought of the, now notorious, black vans from Earth. Vickers stopped only a step after.

"Chief." She said.

"Yeah." He replied.

"Do you think the Captain would betray his country?" She asked in a whisper.

Vickers took in a deep breath and then exhaled loudly. "You didn't read his file in depth did you?" He asked with just a hint of annoyance.

"Of course I read his file." She snapped back.

"Then you didn't read it well enough." Vickers said calmly. "Or you don't know how to read between the lines."

"And what does that mean?" She asked, getting annoyed with the SEAL now.

"Choi's Korean." Vicker said. "Or half Korean. Whatever. But he's also like four generations removed from the Korean part of his family." He crossed his arms as he looked at her. "His dad was Korean, and still fought in the war when his number was pulled. He died. And Choi has EVERY reason to hate both our military AND the East Asia Conglomeration for it. What's left of em anyways. So does his mom and brother for that matter."

"Where are you going with this?" She asked.

"He joined up anyways." Vickers said with a shrug. "And minus a few marks here or there, he's had a pretty good run in the Army. Even if he was only using the Army as a means to an end, which I'm pretty sure was the case, he's still shown almost no hostility to the U.S. If he was a traitor than I think he'd be a bit more agressive about his game. But he was going to college, he was helping his mom with his brother. Not to be a nuclear physicist, or advanced chemist or something. Just to become a nurse. Like I said, I think for him the Army was just a tool."

"So you DON'T think he'd betray America?" She asked.

Vickers looked at her flatly for a moment, as if not believing the question.

"No." He said, just as flatly. "No I DON'T think Captain Choi is a traitor. I think he just dislikes authority and doesn't wanna see us turn this place into Water War Two; Magic Boogaloo." He shrugged again. "After all, he kinda has a vested interest in keeping this place nice looking, what with him probably being here the rest of his life." He paused, and his eyebrows furrowed. "Hell, I don't even want that." He said, more to himself than to her.

She bit her tongue as she turned around and began walking again.

That hadn't been the answer she'd expected, though now that she heard it she knew it was accurate. Plus she was mad that Vickers had also noticed Choi's signals during the meeting, despite seeming as though he wasn't even mentally present for it.

"It's late." She said as they rounded the corner and saw the doors to her office and her quarters. "Bring him to me tomorrow."

"Aye aye ma'am." Vickers said sarcastically as she went into her room for the night.

\----------

James was stretching, bending over as far as he could and bringing his face down almost until it touched his knees, when Vickers found him the next morning.

"Choi." He said in his version of a greeting.

"What's up?" James replied as he massaged the backs of his calves, still bent almost in half.

"Good show yesterday." Vickers said. "Sadly Werner saw through your little kissy faces with your girlfriend."

"Oh?" James said, mocking surprise. "Let me guess; The principal is calling me to her office?"

Vickers sighed. "Pretty much. Wants you in her office as soon as you can."

James stood up, stretched his back a bit. "I'll get to it after I'm done training." He said.

"Training?" Vickers said, looking James up and down. Then looked around at the empty courtyard. "In full armor? By yourself? At just past dawn? And with no shoes?" He asked. "What the hell kinda training are you up to?"

James smiled and walked out into the middle of the courtyard. Vickers moved to follow him, but James signaled for him to stay put.

"I was bored AS HELL yesterday." James said. "Had a lot of time to think and sorta mentally prep some stuff. And I had an idea." He bit his lip and shrugged just a little bit. "Plus I've been mad as hell since Werner showed up and slapped us with her metaphorical dick." He said with a slight grimace. "And now that she's trying to do it again, I have to admit, I'm a little more mad."

Vickers was curious as to where this train of thought was going.

"But, I'd rather be constructive than destructive. So I'm figuring out a channel for it." He looked back, looking just a bit guilty. "This might be a bit of both though." He admitted.

"What're you gonna do?" Vickers asked, though he thought he had an idea.

James just smiled and closed his eyes for a moment. His feet began to glow.

Without opening his eyes Choi spoke again, yelling.
"IFIDIEDON'TLETWERNERHAVEANYOFMYSHIT!"

Vickers didn't have any time to respond before James suddenly leapt into the air, even higher than he had before, during the video demonstrating his new powers. Vickers thought that he could probably get to the top of some of the lower parts of the castle wall now.

At the apex of the leap a massive explosion detonated where Vickers had last seen Choi. He almost jumped to the ground, instincts taking over for just a moment.

Then he heard a yell.

It wasn't a scared or hurt yell.

It was a yell of excitement.

He looked up and saw a small, Choi-shaped, smoking, streak flying off into the distance.

He saw Choi begin to arc downwards towards the ground, nearly a quarter of a mile away now. Then he flipped over and Vickers saw a glow build up again. Another explosion, muted by distance, and Choi was flying off in a completely different trajectory.

He heard another yell of victory.

"Holy shit." Vickers said to himself as several guards came running out into the courtyard. "He fuckin' did it." In the distance, another explosion occurred.

"What the hellsssss isss that?" Asked a guard that looked like a snake.

"That's Captain Choi." Vickers responded. "That rocket jumping maniac." He said under his breath.

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On the screen of the Communication hub stood General Krick, flanked on each side by Secretary Grant and Colonel Muhhamed. James was somewhat confused by Grant taking the back seat. But that was above his pay grade. If the King was confused by it, then he didn't show it.

"We have decided to postpone signing your trade agreement for now, as you know." The King continued. "As we discussed before, we will have to determine the inherent values of various goods and services in relation to the gold standard that we've agreed to use until a more concise way can be determined." He held out his hand and Marcos handed him a scroll that the King held up for display. "We have here a list of our most commonly traded goods, as well as several of our more highly priced goods. Or at least the ones that the Ambassador here confirmed, would have parallels on your world. We can read them off now if you'd like, or we can simply save them for the camera later." King Farrick finished.

"We can save that for later your majesty." General Krick replied. "We've likewise compiled a similar list with the help of Captain Choi and Chief Vickers, who have both gotten a pretty decent bit of experience with your country's economy." He tapped a command into his interface and the document popped up on the communication hub. "It should help us get the math figured out and we should be able to move forward in a more economically sound fashion."

King Farrick nodded and handed the scroll back to Marcos.

"Moving on to the matter of Earth based military intervention in times of emergency." King Farrick said as he moved the affair forward. "We do have a few amendments we'd like on this, hopefully they are agreeable."

This was hour three of the meeting so far. James had felt both bored and incredibly out of his depth while listening to the two leaders. It was going to be another hour before they took a one hour break for lunch.

James was considering going AWOL after that. He couldn't handle listening to any more of the legal Kung Fu going on much longer.

But he had a feeling that Amina would kill him if he abandoned her here.

He fought back a yawn as the King and the General continued.

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Werner walked quickly back to the office to store the copies of the signed documents that the King's people had given her. Vickers quietly walked behind her as she went over the meeting in her head. Despite having read his file, and having had a rather long conversation with him about Choi, she still couldn't read the SEAL. His face had been completely blank throughout the entire delegation. He'd barely even moved unless he'd been spoken to directly. The only sign that he'd even been alive had been the occasional blink.

But it turned out that he wasn't nearly as much of a mystery to her as Choi had become.

It had been obvious throughout the meeting that Choi had given the King, or more realistically the Princess, inside information on what to look out for in the various legal agreements. Almost every loophole had been sealed shut, or at the very least tightened to almost nonexistence. She knew that as a royal court the King had to have numerous retainers whose jobs it was to check for such things. But the thoroughness of their checks had been startling.

And the little shit of a captain had NOT been as subtle as he'd thought while he'd sat at the table. She'd caught the glances and winks and other little signals that Choi had given the princess showing how satisfied he was that those loopholes had been caught. How he'd helped them catch them she didn't know. As far as his records went he would have had no experiences with the legal system, at least outside of a court martial he'd gotten in his second year in the Army. And that was military justice, not international, or rather inter-dimensional, politics.

As she walked she typed a message on her phone and sent it to the Earth-side.

>Does Choi have any experience with the legal system that isn't in his file? If not, does his mother or any of his close family?

She thought back to the conversation she'd had with him after his return from Jadesport. She'd known then that he would resist the new changes to how things worked with her being here. She'd expected rebellion.

But this was on the verge of sedition. And that had not been what she'd expected of him.

To help another government counteract the U.S.'s attempts at gaining a foothold in this world? That was the kind of thing that would get you black-vanned back on Earth.

She stopped as she thought of the, now notorious, black vans from Earth. Vickers stopped only a step after.

"Chief." She said.

"Yeah." He replied.

"Do you think the Captain would betray his country?" She asked in a whisper.

Vickers took in a deep breath and then exhaled loudly. "You didn't read his file in depth did you?" He asked with just a hint of annoyance.

"Of course I read his file." She snapped back.

"Then you didn't read it well enough." Vickers said calmly. "Or you don't know how to read between the lines."

"And what does that mean?" She asked, getting annoyed with the SEAL now.

"Choi's Korean." Vicker said. "Or half Korean. Whatever. But he's also like four generations removed from the Korean part of his family." He crossed his arms as he looked at her. "His dad was Korean, and still fought in the war when his number was pulled. He died. And Choi has EVERY reason to hate both our military AND the East Asia Conglomeration for it. What's left of em anyways. So does his mom and brother for that matter."

"Where are you going with this?" She asked.

"He joined up anyways." Vickers said with a shrug. "And minus a few marks here or there, he's had a pretty good run in the Army. Even if he was only using the Army as a means to an end, which I'm pretty sure was the case, he's still shown almost no hostility to the U.S. If he was a traitor than I think he'd be a bit more agressive about his game. But he was going to college, he was helping his mom with his brother. Not to be a nuclear physicist, or advanced chemist or something. Just to become a nurse. Like I said, I think for him the Army was just a tool."

"So you DON'T think he'd betray America?" She asked.

Vickers looked at her flatly for a moment, as if not believing the question.

"No." He said, just as flatly. "No I DON'T think Captain Choi is a traitor. I think he just dislikes authority and doesn't wanna see us turn this place into Water War Two; Magic Boogaloo." He shrugged again. "After all, he kinda has a vested interest in keeping this place nice looking, what with him probably being here the rest of his life." He paused, and his eyebrows furrowed. "Hell, I don't even want that." He said, more to himself than to her.

She bit her tongue as she turned around and began walking again.

That hadn't been the answer she'd expected, though now that she heard it she knew it was accurate. Plus she was mad that Vickers had also noticed Choi's signals during the meeting, despite seeming as though he wasn't even mentally present for it.

"It's late." She said as they rounded the corner and saw the doors to her office and her quarters. "Bring him to me tomorrow."

"Aye aye ma'am." Vickers said sarcastically as she went into her room for the night.

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James was stretching, bending over as far as he could and bringing his face down almost until it touched his knees, when Vickers found him the next morning.

"Choi." He said in his version of a greeting.

"What's up?" James replied as he massaged the backs of his calves, still bent almost in half.

"Good show yesterday." Vickers said. "Sadly Werner saw through your little kissy faces with your girlfriend."

"Oh?" James said, mocking surprise. "Let me guess; The principal is calling me to her office?"

Vickers sighed. "Pretty much. Wants you in her office as soon as you can."

James stood up, stretched his back a bit. "I'll get to it after I'm done training." He said.

"Training?" Vickers said, looking James up and down. Then looked around at the empty courtyard. "In full armor? By yourself? At just past dawn? And with no shoes?" He asked. "What the hell kinda training are you up to?"

James smiled and walked out into the middle of the courtyard. Vickers moved to follow him, but James signaled for him to stay put.

"I was bored AS HELL yesterday." James said. "Had a lot of time to think and sorta mentally prep some stuff. And I had an idea." He bit his lip and shrugged just a little bit. "Plus I've been mad as hell since Werner showed up and slapped us with her metaphorical dick." He said with a slight grimace. "And now that she's trying to do it again, I have to admit, I'm a little more mad."

Vickers was curious as to where this train of thought was going.

"But, I'd rather be constructive than destructive. So I'm figuring out a channel for it." He looked back, looking just a bit guilty. "This might be a bit of both though." He admitted.

"What're you gonna do?" Vickers asked, though he thought he had an idea.

James just smiled and closed his eyes for a moment. His feet began to glow.

Without opening his eyes Choi spoke again, yelling. "IFIDIEDON'TLETWERNERHAVEANYOFMYSHIT!"

Vickers didn't have any time to respond before James suddenly leapt into the air, even higher than he had before, during the video demonstrating his new powers. Vickers thought that he could probably get to the top of some of the lower parts of the castle wall now.

At the apex of the leap a massive explosion detonated where Vickers had last seen Choi. He almost jumped to the ground, instincts taking over for just a moment.

Then he heard a yell.

It wasn't a scared or hurt yell.

It was a yell of excitement.

He looked up and saw a small, Choi-shaped, smoking, streak flying off into the distance.

He saw Choi begin to arc downwards towards the ground, nearly a quarter of a mile away now. Then he flipped over and Vickers saw a glow build up again. Another explosion, muted by distance, and Choi was flying off in a completely different trajectory.

He heard another yell of victory.

"Holy shit." Vickers said to himself as several guards came running out into the courtyard. "He fuckin' did it." In the distance, another explosion occurred.

"What the hellsssss isss that?" Asked a guard that looked like a snake.

"That's Captain Choi." Vickers responded. "That rocket jumping maniac." He said under his breath.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/viezsi/wait_is_this_just_gate_171/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (169/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vd5dto/wait_is_this_just_gate_168/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Kela has a nose for trouble.

Enjoy.

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James left the comms room only marginally less angry than when he'd left the ambassador's office.

The General had given him his orders officially: stay near the castle, stay out of trouble, obery orders relayed through the ambassador. He didn't like any of that, but he liked that last bit the least.

He'd also been introduced James to Secretary of Defense Grant, whom James recognized from the recording.

And just like that the pieces had fallen into place in his mind.

This wasn't something the General wanted. Probably not the Colonel either, though he wasn't a hundred percent certain on that one.

This was something being done by pencil pushers. James hadn't dealt with anywhere near as many of them as Vickers had, and definitely not as many as the General. But even an army mechanic couldn't escape dealing with them some times. There was a particular civilian at his base's finance division who had caused him not end of grief when he'd had an issue with his meal card a year before. Plus there were the handful of civilians in the unit's supply room. But he hadn't dealt with them too often.

James had a feeling that Grant was going to be like the lady in finance.

Vickers was waiting outside the comms room, leaning on the wall and chewing a piece of jerky from his pack as he waited for James to finish.

"Suits?" He asked simply as James walked past.

"Damn near the biggest suit out there?" James replied.

Vickers raised an eyebrow. "D.C.?"

James didn't slow down. "Yup. Go look for yourself." He said as he stomped down the hall.

"Careful Choi." Vickers said as he lifted off of the wall and stepped forward. "Big fish in deep water."

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James and Amina met on their way back to their room. She was going over some of the contracts that Earth had sent over, which she'd pressured one of the scribes to give her despite her fathers suggestion to wait a day. James grumbling and unstrapping his armor and putting it in his bottomless bag as he walked.

As a result, Amina read his frustration easily. "Bad?" She asked as she fell in next to him, putting the contract back in its odd cream colored folder.

"Bad." He said simply. "How bout you?"

Amina held up the folder. "Legal agreements." James took the folder and quickly glanced inside. He grimaced at the sight of the small type, dual language, legalese within. "And father doesn't trust the Ambassador."

"Good." James replied as he handed the folder back. "I don't either."

"He says she may be the one you warned him about." She added. "I thought Vickers was that person. But now that I think about it, he doesn't seem the sort."

"No." James agreed. "No, if Vickers ever wants to cause problems he'll probably just start pulling triggers. And he'll do it openly. Or at least as openly as a Navy Seal can."

"These documents are absolutely insane." She said, holding the folder up for emphasis. "I've never seen something soooo.... pedantic."

"What's it about?" He asked, certain that he wouldn't actually want to know.

"Something about you, Vickers', and Werner's basic needs. Primarily about food and water." She replied.

James stopped in his tracks. "Food and.... water?" He wondered.

"Yes?" She said. Then she seemed to realize why he'd asked. "Water..." She said.

James looked at her sternly. "Go over that one with a microscope." He said.

"I'll make sure that extra attention is paid to this one." She said.

James chose not to linger on that particular subject. "He's right though. Your father. He can't trust Werner. But for now I'm going to have no choice but to play ball with her."

"Play ball?" Amina asked.

"It means, 'to go along.' I'm not being given much choice." he said. "If I don't then they people on Earth cut off my phone signal."

"You mean that you won't be able to talk to your mom and brother?" She asked, looking almost as upset at the idea as James was feeling. "How can they do that?"

"The General isn't the one running the show anymore." He admitted.

"Really?"

"Yeah. The politicians are running things now." He answered. "A man called Secretary of Defense Grant."

"Father didn't mention him." She replied. "Secretary?"

"Not like a normal secretary." James said. "It's..... well, I actually don't know why secretary is such a high position. It's just a thing."

"Are you going to get into trouble for letting me know all this?" She asked.

"Probably." He replied with a shrug. "But you're my fiance, so it's probably expected. Honestly don't know what kind of secrets I could even give up. I'm just warning you of background bullshit on our side."

Just as he said this they finally reached the door to their room. James opened the door.

"Wanna engage in some stress relief?" He asked as she walked past and into the room.

"For the past few hours now." She said as he shut the door behind them.

\----------

Patricia Werner jumped as she exited her new office and saw the nearly seven foot werewolf standing outside of it.

"Good evening Captain Swiftrunner." She said with a forced smile as she recovered from the shock. "I'm surprised you haven't turned in for the night. It was a long trip here."

Kela ignored the greeting as she looked the ambassador up and down. Finally she took several long and deep sniffs of the air.

"Is there something I can do for you captain?" Werner asked.

With one last deep sniff Kela straightened back up and opened her dark yellow eyes to stare at Werner, whom she towered over.

"There is a sickness in you." Kela said. "It is like the flesh rot.... but.... different. Smaller. Deeper." She sniffed lightly once more. "In your mind."

How can she know that from scent? Werner wondered.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about." Werner countered.

"Hmmm.... I wonder." Kela said in return. "Is that true? Or is it the reason they allowed you to come here in the first place? Because unlike the other two they don't have to worry about getting you back."

Werner made sure to keep her poker face on. "I'm as healthy as anyone Captain Swiftrunner. What are you trying to accuse me of?"

"Accuse?" Kela wondered. "I accuse nothing. Though I do wonder if such an important job can be left to someone who might not live to see its fruition."

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Kela simply stared at him, unamused.

"But seriously." Vickers continued. "I've been assigned as the ambassador's personal guard should she require one. So if that is a threat, you might wanna walk it back."

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"Well. If you don't mind, could you do your musings elsewhere?" Werner asked. "The chief has just spoken to command and I believe that he's here to have a word." She looked at Vickers who was nodding. "Had kind of expected it to wait til tomorrow." She admitted.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vho7hs/wait_is_this_just_gate_170/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (169/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vd5c8o/wait_is_this_just_gate_168/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vho0zg/wait_is_this_just_gate_170/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (168/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/vcetev/wait_is_this_just_gate_167/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Vickers is.... a bro again?

Enjoy.

\~

"I dislike her." Kela said simply. "There is something wrong with her, though I do not know what."

"James clearly didn't like her." Amina said. "And while I don't know him well enough to be certain, I don't think Vickers did either."

"Having been dealing with her for the past four days I can honestly say that I share the sentiment." The King replied as he produced a flame from his fingertip and lit the dried weed in his pipe. It puffed several times before he exhaled a slow purple cloud of smoke. "The legal scribes have been going over paperwork with her for the past two days." He said grimly. "They are simultaneously astounded by, and terrified of, the paperwork she's brought to begin official agreements between our worlds."

"What kind of paperwork?" Amina asked.

"Legal agreements and treatises determining what their people are and are not allowed to do while in our world. Trade agreements. A bill of rights for their people detailing how they should be treated should they cause any problems that require they be detained or tried." He took a deep breath, inhaling a large lungful of the purple smoke as he rubbed his forehead. "Plus about twenty other documents on a hundred other subjects." He paused as he exhaled the smoke fully. "I've never seen anything like it. Neither have the scribes. Each document is many dozens of pages, written in both our language and theirs. The comprehensiveness of them.... It's like they've learned to cover every angle of every subject they approach."

Amina balked at the concept. "May I see some of them?" She asked, though she secretly hoped her father would say no.

"On the morrow." He said, relieving her only a little. "They're still being reviewed. I'm expected to make my decision on several of them before the weeks end."

"And if you don't agree to them?" Kela asked.

"I'll be expected to explain my reasoning, and if possible offer alternative solutions that may be amended into the agreements." He said. "I've already got a few issues that have been raised and are being altered." He grumbled a bit. "They have this caste of worker known as a

'lawyer'. They seem to fulfill the role of our legal champions, though they are significantly more insidious. I got the sense that nobody on their side liked them very much. Not even the other lawyers."

"What will happen if you completely disagree with one of the documents?" Amina asked. "It's not like they can enforce any of them from their side."

Her father raised an eyebrow at the question. "Luckily it hasn't come to that." He replied. "For what it's worth most of the agreements are sensible, if a touch convoluted." He gave a quick laugh. "A touch. More like entirely." He tapped the ashes out of his pipe and placed it back in its container. "Depending on the document, it could be reason for them to take a more hostile stance in our dealings. But most of them would simply require Captain Choi and Chief Vickers to be more.... militant... in their dealings with us."

"They would fight us?" Kela asked in surprise "I doubt James would do that at this point. And the other one already knows that he would be outmatched."

"No." King Farrick countered. "I doubt it would go that far. But they would be required to treat our kingdom as hostile, or at least unfriendly, territory. Something about wearing uniforms and staying armed at all times. Though I don't see how that would help them. And also that the people on the other side of the God's door would be significantly less likely to send us any aid. Regardless of the situation."

"You mean if the blight launches another attack?" Amina asked, understanding his meaning. "The missiles?"

"Yes." The King replied. "Though, if I'm honest, I could do without seeing those things again. But apparently the General overstepped by using them in the first place. It has conjured scrutiny from his government. Hence the ambassador."

"And what do you believe her purpose is?" Kela asked, tone flat and emotionless.

"As I have said." The King began. "I believe that she is the person that James warned us of. The person who comes at us sideways. The one that will smile even as they attempt to cause our fall."

"We could slay her." Kela added. "It wouldn't be difficult. This is a dangerous world, and she doesn't seem a warrior."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (168/?)

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Writer's note: Vickers is.... a bro again?

Enjoy.

\~

"I dislike her." Kela said simply. "There is something wrong with her, though I do not know what."

"James clearly didn't like her." Amina said. "And while I don't know him well enough to be certain, I don't think Vickers did either."

"Having been dealing with her for the past four days I can honestly say that I share the sentiment." The King replied as he produced a flame from his fingertip and lit the dried weed in his pipe. It puffed several times before he exhaled a slow purple cloud of smoke. "The legal scribes have been going over paperwork with her for the past two days." He said grimly. "They are simultaneously astounded by, and terrified of, the paperwork she's brought to begin official agreements between our worlds."

"What kind of paperwork?" Amina asked.

"Legal agreements and treatises determining what their people are and are not allowed to do while in our world. Trade agreements. A bill of rights for their people detailing how they should be treated should they cause any problems that require they be detained or tried." He took a deep breath, inhaling a large lungful of the purple smoke as he rubbed his forehead. "Plus about twenty other documents on a hundred other subjects." He paused as he exhaled the smoke fully. "I've never seen anything like it. Neither have the scribes. Each document is many dozens of pages, written in both our language and theirs. The comprehensiveness of them.... It's like they've learned to cover every angle of every subject they approach."

Amina balked at the concept. "May I see some of them?" She asked, though she secretly hoped her father would say no.

"On the morrow." He said, relieving her only a little. "They're still being reviewed. I'm expected to make my decision on several of them before the weeks end."

"And if you don't agree to them?" Kela asked.

"I'll be expected to explain my reasoning, and if possible offer alternative solutions that may be amended into the agreements." He said. "I've already got a few issues that have been raised and are being altered." He grumbled a bit. "They have this caste of worker known as a 'lawyer'. They seem to fulfill the role of our legal champions, though they are significantly more insidious. I got the sense that nobody on their side liked them very much. Not even the other lawyers."

"What will happen if you completely disagree with one of the documents?" Amina asked. "It's not like they can enforce any of them from their side."

Her father raised an eyebrow at the question. "Luckily it hasn't come to that." He replied. "For what it's worth most of the agreements are sensible, if a touch convoluted." He gave a quick laugh. "A touch. More like entirely." He tapped the ashes out of his pipe and placed it back in

its container. "Depending on the document, it could be reason for them to take a more hostile stance in our dealings. But most of them would simply require Captain Choi and Chief Vickers to be more.... militant... in their dealings with us."

"They would fight us?" Kela asked in surprise "I doubt James would do that at this point. And the other one already knows that he would be outmatched."

"No." King Farrick countered. "I doubt it would go that far. But they would be required to treat our kingdom as hostile, or at least unfriendly, territory. Something about wearing uniforms and staying armed at all times. Though I don't see how that would help them. And also that the people on the other side of the God's door would be significantly less likely to send us any aid. Regardless of the situation."

"You mean if the blight launches another attack?" Amina asked, understanding his meaning. "The missiles?"

"Yes." The King replied. "Though, if I'm honest, I could do without seeing those things again. But apparently the General overstepped by using them in the first place. It has conjured scrutiny from his government. Hence the ambassador."

"And what do you believe her purpose is?" Kela asked, tone flat and emotionless.

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"You missed the part where I started a culinary revolution." James said flatly.

"I'm sorry." She replied. "What was that?"

"Oh yeah." Vickers interjected. "He taught em how to make burgers.... and passable coffee." He looked over to James a bit. "When are you gonna teach em how to make pizza? I'm dyin' for a slice man."

James nodded. "That was next on the list. You know how to make the dough?" He held up a finger. "Nevermind. Forgot that now that we're back I got signal. I can google it."

"Can you?" The ambassador asked. James could see a muscle twitching in her neck.

"Uhhh. Yeah?" James said, though he was suddenly unsure.

He pulled his phone out and saw that the screen was showing the symbol for roaming.

"What?" James asked, confused. "You got signal?" He asked Vickers.

"Neither of you do." Werner interrupted. "And you won't unless command deems it necessary. And that will primarily depend on whether or not I say it's necessary."

Next to him Vickers let out a sigh as he went back to looking as if he wasn't paying attention.

"Fuck that." James said in response. "I just got back from a long, rather emotional, trip. I need to call my mom and brother and let em know I'm back and okay."

"And you will." She replied before he could continue. "AFTER you do a debriefing with command."

"And what about the rest of the time?" James asked, getting a little angry now.

"Any other time you wish to make contact with anyone other than command, or utilize any of your devices for anything other than official duty? You come to me." She shrugged. "If I determine that the reasoning is good, then I'll approve it and send the request up the line."

"What if it's an emergency?" He asked.

"Is there anything you can do with your phone that you, as a soldier, a mechanic, and a nursing student, CAN'T do in an emergency? Anything that you can't simply.... radio in? Cause you'll still have your radio." She replied with a fake smile.

James didn't have an answer for that. He and Werner sat there staring at each other for a few moments. Then James pulled out his phone, changed the pin code on it to one that was three numbers longer, and sent a message to command.

>Don't give this Ambassador asshole my PIN.

The phone gave him a warning that it would send the message whenever it got signal again. Then he locked the screen and slid the phone across the desk.

"I don't need that Captain Choi." She said simply.

"Apparently neither do I." He replied as he stood up and went to walk out of the room.

"You haven't been dismissed yet Captain." She said as he opened the door.

He paused and looked back at her. "That video from the General said that you would be the one relaying all our orders from command, and that we should send any requests through you TO command. It never said that YOU specifically were our chain of command. Luckily the General left that part pretty open to interpretation." He turned back and stepped out of the door. "See ya at detention." He said as it shut.

Vickers just sat in the chair, motionless, and still looking like he was checked out.

"Why are you still here chief?" She asked, with just a hint of anger.

He looked at her. "I didn't hear the bell ring saying class was dismissed." He deadpanned.

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"Oh yeah." Vickers interjected. "He taught em how to make burgers.... and passable coffee." He looked over to James a bit. "When are you gonna teach em how to make pizza? I'm dyin' for a slice man."

James nodded. "That was next on the list. You know how to make the dough?" He held up a finger. "Nevermind. Forgot that now that we're back I got signal. I can google it."

"Can you?" The ambassador asked. James could see a muscle twitching in her neck.

"Uhhh. Yeah?" James said, though he was suddenly unsure.

He pulled his phone out and saw that the screen was showing the symbol for roaming.

"What?" James asked, confused. "You got signal?" He asked Vickers.

"Neither of you do." Werner interrupted. "And you won't unless command deems it necessary. And that will primarily depend on whether or not I say it's necessary."

Next to him Vickers let out a sigh as he went back to looking as if he wasn't paying attention.

"Fuck that." James said in response. "I just got back from a long, rather emotional, trip. I need to call my mom and brother and let em know I'm back and okay."

"And you will." She replied before he could continue. "AFTER you do a debriefing with command."

"And what about the rest of the time?" James asked, getting a little angry now.

"Any other time you wish to make contact with anyone other than command, or utilize any of your devices for anything other than official duty? You come to me." She shrugged. "If I determine that the reasoning is good, then I'll approve it and send the request up the line."

"What if it's an emergency?" He asked.

"Is there anything you can do with your phone that you, as a soldier, a mechanic, and a nursing student, CAN'T do in an emergency? Anything that you can't simply.... radio in? Cause you'll still have your radio." She replied with a fake smile.

James didn't have an answer for that. He and Werner sat there staring at each other for a few moments. Then James pulled out his phone, changed the pin code on it to one that was three numbers longer, and sent a message to command.

>Don't give this Ambassador asshole my PIN.

The phone gave him a warning that it would send the message whenever it got signal again. Then he locked the screen and slid the phone across the desk.

"I don't need that Captain Choi." She said simply.

"Apparently neither do I." He replied as he stood up and went to walk out of the room.

"You haven't been dismissed yet Captain." She said as he opened the door.

He paused and looked back at her. "That video from the General said that you would be the one relaying all our orders from command, and that we

should send any requests through you TO command. It never said that YOU specifically were our chain of command. Luckily the General left that part pretty open to interpretation." He turned back and stepped out of the door. "See ya at detention." He said as it shut.

Vickers just sat in the chair, motionless, and still looking like he was checked out.

"Why are you still here chief?" She asked, with just a hint of anger.

He looked at her. "I didn't hear the bell ring saying class was dismissed." He deadpanned.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/vd5c8o/wait_is_this_just_gate_168/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (166/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/v9k8ca/wait_is_this_just_gate_165/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: SecDef better watch out before he's intercepted by a heat guided ***CHANCLA!!!!***

Enjoy

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"Good evening Captain Choi, Chief Vickers." "Ambassador Werner greeted them as they entered the castle's main entry room. She made a point of shaking each of their hands as she greeted them. "And it's such a pleasure to meet you Princess, Captain Swiftrunner." She said as she gripped their wrists in the way James had seen them greet other locals.

"Uuuuuh... Hi?" James said as the unexpected Earthling greeted them all. "I'm sorry, who are you? And why the hell weren't we told that someone from Earth was being sent here?"

"I'm Ambassador Werner, I've been sent to act as an official, non-military, liason to the United States Government." She replied with a smile that James didn't like.

"Why?" James asked.

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"And what does the King think of all of this?" Kela asked as she crossed her arms. James could see the fur on the back of her neck rising a bit.

"He understands the need for a proper diplomat with his new allies." Said King Farrick as he entered the room flanked by two guards."Amina, Kela, would you please come with me? We have some things to discuss." He signalled to one of his guards who then went to grab the door to the next wing. "Plus I imagine Captain Choi and his.... comrades.... have a lot to discuss."

Amina gave James's arm a squeeze before moving to follow her father. Kela looked at him with an eyebrow raised, then also followed.

"Thank you your highness." Werner said before turning back to the ambassadorial wing. "Gentlemen, with me please."

Vickers didn't hesitate to follow the ambassador.

But James lingered for a moment. He looked toward the door that the King had just walked through, then back in the direction that Werner and Vickers were headed. Vickers was watching the video on his tablet as he walked, the audio either low, or routed to his earpiece.

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Margaret was practically sweating as she headed into the facility. She'd been asked to come in to discuss some changes to the operation and how she would be given information or contact with James.

Her thoughts lingered on the suitcase that had been dropped off only a few days before. After reading the note that had been sent with it she'd been tempted to call the base MP's and report it.

But the initials on the note, coupled with its contents, had given her pause.

Inside had been a pair of labcoats, glasses, and a pair of badges that she'd recognized as belonging to the staff in the facility. She had one of her own that marked her as a visitor and had large red letters saying "Escort Required".

These new badges had pictures of both her and Joey on them, and marked them as a technician and an engineer respectively. The pictures had been altered, Hers showed her wearing the tortoise shell glasses that were in the bag as well a slight overbite. Joey's showed him with the rounded gold glasses that were in the bag, which had a tint to them.

The last and, to her most concerning, thing in the bag had been a taser.

It looked just like the kind that the MP's and the facility guards kept holstered on their vests.

"Mrs. Choi?" Asked the guard, Staff Sergeant Strand, at the entry point. She was holding out the badge to give back to her. Margaret had talked to her several times before, and thought she was a nice young soldier. She'd even told the young Staff Sergeant to call her by her married name instead of the one on record. "Is everything okay?"

"Hmm? Oh." She said as she gingerly took the visitor's badge back. "Yes. Sorry, just worried. The General wants to speak about some changes to my access. I'm.... just worried." She said, oversharing a bit.

The young woman looked at her with sympathy. "Sorry to hear that ma'am. If it makes you feel any better; it's probably not General Krick's idea."

"Oh, why do you say that?" She asked, curious at the new information.

"Hasn't anyone told you yet? The Secretary of Defense is here." She leaned in to whisper, almost conspiratorially. "He's here to make sure we're all keeping things white glove clean."

The door opened and one of the guards from the other side stepped through as the entry guard pulled back.

"Mrs. DeLaRosa." The guard called for her.

Margaret nodded at Strand, who mouthed a "good luck", as she moved to follow the escort inside.

It took several minutes to get from the main entrance check in to the room that the guard took her to. It was a floor above where she normally went to send messages to James. General Krick opened the door from inside and greeted her. But inside were several large men and women wearing suits and ties, and one older, grey haired man that she recognized from the news.

"Ms. DeLaRosa." He greeted her with an offered hand. "A pleasure to meet the mother of our young Captain." He had a smile that was simultaneously charming and seemed over exaggerated. "I'm Secretary of Defense Grant. Please, come take a seat." He said as he pulled out and offered her a chair at the conference table. He also gestured to one of the suit wearing people. "Smith, refreshments please."

"It's a pleasure to meet you." She said as she forced herself to smile, and to not think of the suitcase. "May I ask what this is all about?"

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"Then, what's going on?" She asked.

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"I'm sorry?" He said, surprised at the interruption.

"You got it right the first time. It's DeLaRosa." She reiterated.

"Or, pardon." He said while holding his hands up in mock surrender. "I'd just heard that you let some people call you by your married name."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (166/?)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (165/?)

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Writer's note:

HIGH IMPACT POLITICAL INTRIGUE!!!

Enjoy.

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So, here they were, riding again.

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"Right?" James asked rhetorically.

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"Do you think he's right?"

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"Have you been through a 'restructuring' before at least?" She asked.

James nodded slightly. "When I was in A.I.T. our Battalion commander changed. One Colonel for another. I think the first one retired." He looked at her out of the corner of his eye for a moment. "Admittedly, back then I was a young, dumb, lil private. So I had no idea about any of that stuff until we had a full bird doing an inspection of our barracks."

"What does that mean?" She asked.

"Well. If Vickers is right. If the 'powers that be' are switching things up on the Earth side." He cringed. "It could mean that the General and Colonel, and even the whole base back on Earth, are under some incredible scrutiny right now." *They could be going through the top secret base equivalent of a barracks party.* He thought but didn't say.

Amina seemed to understand that much. "Let's hope he's wrong." She said after a few moments. "After all, the marriage is in the spring. We need to start our visitations."

"I'll make sure the General RSVP's." James said with a chuckle.

He'd completely forgotten that their wedding day was only just around the corner.

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King Farrick awaited the arrival of the new guest.

They'd spent the past few hours being questioned in the ambassadorial wing by some of his guards, as was required of foreign dignitaries. It ensured that they weren't a threat to him, or his kingdom.

But he expected the newcomer to arrive any moment. As such he wasn't surprised when the three then two knock came at the door to the chamber he was currently in.

The two guards, an elf and a half giant looked to him. He nodded and the elf opened the door.

A young, or at least young compared to him, walked in. She was wearing a suit that the King recognized due to its similarity to the one James had worn during the grinner's attack. Though, the only similarity was in the style of the suit. It wasn't the same color, nor did it have any of the badges or pins that James had shown him on his phone. Instead, it was a plain grey suit. She also wore shoes that rose up in the back on very pointed heels, making her several inches taller than she would normally be.

What an odd fashion. The King thought as he looked her over. *That would never catch on here.*

The woman bowed low for some reason as she got near.

"You.... DON'T... have to do that." He said hesitantly.

The woman looked up surprised. "I'm sorry." She said. "Captain Choi hasn't given us a ton of information on how formal we need to be with you." She stuck her hand out. "I'm ambassador Patricia Werner. It's an honor to meet you."

The King held out his hand and shook hers.

"It's nice to meet you Ambassador." He said as he released the hand. "I'm surprised your people were willing to send another person through the God's door." He pulled out the seat in front of the desk he'd left to greet her and gestured for her to take it. She did with a smile. "So I have to ask. Why ARE you here?"

She smiled, and for the first time King Farrick spoke with an Earth politician in person.

And he made sure to keep in mind the advice James had given him not so long ago.

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Margaret Choi had been sleeping when the bell rang at the house that the General had arranged for her and Joey to stay at.

She groggily looked at the display of her phone as the second ring came and proved that she hadn't imagined the first one.

"Two A.M.?" She asked the dark room. "Who?"

Then she heard a car door shut and, presumably, the car it was attached to driving away.

She threw on her robe and quickly shuffled down the hall to the front door. When she got there she checked the peephole to see who was outside.

But nobody was there.

She lifted her phone and pulled up the number to SFC Flores. Flores was the person she contacted whenever she wanted an update on James, or to simply get in touch with him. She was also who Margaret was supposed to call if there was a problem with the house.

She cautiously opened the door.

Just as the peephole had shown, nobody was there. She was about to step out a bit and see if she could spot the car when her foot hit something.

She flipped the external light on and saw a small suitcase.

On the top was a small note card. The kind students everywhere used to make flashcards to study with. It had writing on it.

>Hide this. Let nobody else know about or find it.Prepare for changes in how much access they give you.Destroy this note once you've read it.- G.K.

"What the hell?" She asked. But she brought the suitcase into the room and opened it.

The contents filled her with confusion, and just a bit of fear.

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"Well. If Vickers is right. If the 'powers that be' are switching things up on the Earth side." He cringed. "It could mean that the General and Colonel, and even the whole base back on Earth, are under some incredible scrutiny right now." *They could be going through the top secret base equivalent of a barracks party.* He thought but didn't say.

Amina seemed to understand that much. "Let's hope he's wrong." She said after a few moments. "After all, the marriage is in the spring. We need to start our visitations."

"I'll make sure the General RSVP's." James said with a chuckle.

He'd completely forgotten that their wedding day was only just around the corner.

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King Farrick awaited the arrival of the new guest.

They'd spent the past few hours being questioned in the ambassadorial wing by some of his guards, as was required of foreign dignitaries. It ensured that they weren't a threat to him, or his kingdom.

But he expected the newcomer to arrive any moment. As such he wasn't surprised when the three then two knock came at the door to the chamber he was currently in.

The two guards, an elf and a half giant looked to him. He nodded and the elf opened the door.

A young, or at least young compared to him, woman walked in. She was wearing a suit that the King recognized due to its similarity to the one James had worn during the grinner's attack. Though, the only similarity was in the style of the suit. It wasn't the same color, nor did it have any of the badges or pins that James had shown him on his phone. Instead, it was a plain grey suit. She also wore shoes that rose up in the back on very pointed heels, making her several inches taller than she would normally be.

What an odd fashion. The King thought as he looked her over. *That would never catch on here.*

The woman bowed low for some reason as she got near.

"You.... DON'T... have to do that." He said hesitantly.

The woman looked up surprised. "I'm sorry." She said. "Captain Choi hasn't given us a ton of information on how formal we need to be with you." She stuck her hand out. "I'm ambassador Patricia Werner. It's an honor to meet you."

The King held out his hand and shook hers.

"It's nice to meet you Ambassador." He said as he released the hand. "I'm surprised your people were willing to send another person through the God's door." He pulled out the seat in front of the desk he'd left to greet her and gestured for her to take it. She did with a smile. "So I have to ask. Why ARE you here?"

She smiled, and for the first time King Farrick spoke with an Earth politician in person.

And he made sure to keep in mind the advice James had given him not so long ago.

\---------------------------

Margaret Choi had been sleeping when the bell rang at the house that the General had arranged for her and Joey to stay at.

She groggily looked at the display of her phone as the second ring came and proved that she hadn't imagined the first one.

"Two A.M.?" She asked the dark room. "Who?"

Then she heard a car door shut and, presumably, the car it was attached to driving away.

She threw on her robe and quickly shuffled down the hall to the front door. When she got there she checked the peephole to see who was outside.

But nobody was there.

She lifted her phone and pulled up the number to SFC Flores. Flores was the person she contacted whenever she wanted an update on James, or to simply get in touch with him. She was also who Margaret was supposed to call if there was a problem with the house.

She cautiously opened the door.

Just as the peephole had shown, nobody was there. She was about to step out a bit and see if she could spot the car when her foot hit something.

She flipped the external light on and saw a small suitcase.

On the top was a small note card. The kind students everywhere used to make flashcards to study with. It had writing on it.

>Hide this. Let nobody else know about or find it.
>
>Prepare for changes in how much access they give you.
>
>Destroy this note once you've read it.
>
>\- G.K.

"What the hell?" She asked. But she brought the suitcase into the room and opened it.

The contents filled her with confusion, and just a bit of fear.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (164/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James is dumb. But let's be real. We'd probably do the same.

Enjoy

\~

"James! Are you alright!" Veliry asked as she clapped her hands in front of his face.

James opened his eyes slowly.

"Why.... are you upside down?" James asked slowly as he opened his eyes more.

"I'm not." She replied as she grabbed James's shoulder and helped pull him out of the side of the shed that they used to store the training dummies. He fell with a crash as some of the boards fell down on top of him.

"Ow." James moaned as he splayed out on the ground. "Wha... what happened?"

"I was going to ask you that." Veliry countered. "One second you were building up your energy perfectly. Then for no reason it just exploded. What were you visualizing?"

James picked himself up, leaning on his elbow as he did. "I was just imagining flamethrowers. Like I always do when I'm trying to cast the fire spell." He laid down on his back. "Then I remembered that in almost every movie that has flamethrowers.... They always get shot and explode."

Veliry stared at him a bit. "You imagined the thing you base your spell upon.... exploding?"

"It wasn't intentional." James admitted. He looked at the space where he'd been standing, then craned his head back at the shed he'd just fallen from. "Did I.... did I fly?"

"If you call becoming human shrapnel flying, then sure. You could call it flying."

"That's awesome in the worst way." James said.

"Are you crazy?" Veliry asked. "You could have been hurt. You probably are hurt. We should get you to the healers."

"I'm fine." James said. "I'm just gonna lie here for a minute."

Veliry pointed a finger at James. "James you are NOT going to try flying via explosions." She said as she also looked back at his starting point. "You'll kill yourself. Now I'm going to go grab one of the garrison healers." She said before running to grab help.

James just waved a bit as she ran off. "I'm totally gonna use explosions to fly." He said to himself. "Soon as it stops hurting to do so."

James looked down at his boot and saw that it was blasted to tatters. "I need new boots."

James slowly stood up, pulled his arms in to his chest, raised a leg, and began drawing in energy again.

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Vickers knocked on the door to the room three times. He'd bathed and changed back into his full uniform and armor. He was also fully armed. Shield, sword, pistol, and rifle were all in their respective places, though he made a point of not holding any of them.

He'd also made a point of putting the tablet and all his other communication devices in his bottomless bag where they wouldn't be capable of seeing or hearing anything.

"Who is it?" Princess Amina asked from within the room.

"Chief Vickers ma'am." He responded simply.

"Hell's he want?" Vickers heard General Sigbert ask.

"It's fine." Amina responded to the general. "Come on in Chief!"

The door opened before Vickers could grab the handle. Several soldiers were on the other side.

They were also in full battle dress, he noticed.

Princess Amina, General Sigbert, Captain Swiftrunner (who was still bandaged in some spots), and several others were gathered around a series of charts and maps. If it weren't for the medieval armor, and the inhuman nature of some of the people inside, Vickers might have actually felt at home in the city's garrison command room.

"What can we do for you Chief?" Amina asked.

"And why are you dressed as if you're about to head into battle?" Kela added.

"Because I'm here on official United States Military orders." He replied simply. "I was looking for Captain Choi. But I couldn't find him." Vickers added. "Orders have come down through our chain of command. For both of us. We're to return to the capital with all due haste."

"Is something wrong in the capital?" Amina asked.

"Not as far as I know." Vickers admitted. "But we've been ordered to return and await retreival by our people."

"So they've figured out how to get you back?" Kela asked with shock.

"Again, not as far as I know." Vickers repeated. "All I know is the orders they gave us; Return to the capital, await extraction, take no unnecessary risks, and also allow nothing to stop us from that extraction." He said while using his right hand to point at the rifle hanging in front of him.

"Is that a threat?" Kela asked, her hand moving to the grip of her sword.

"I wish." Vickers said with a grin. "But no. I'm simply relaying orders and letting you all know the context. We'll have to leave as soon as we can."

The three of them; Amina, Kela, and Sigbert, looked at each other warily. Sigbert was the one to break the silence.

"City's fine for now." He said, waving his stump at the maps. The fingers on his hand, which still hung from a rawhide string in front of his chest, also waved as if they were still attached to the arm. "We can handle the rest of the recovery. And if those newfangled arrows DO work," he made a point of looking at Vickers. "Then we should be fine if any more beasties show up. Least for a while anyways."

Amina nodded at her uncle's statement, understanding his meaning.

"I can ride." Kela added. "Be sore for a while. But I'll be okay."

Amina looked back at Vickers. "We can leave tomorrow." She said.

"Good." Vickers said in response. "Anyone seen Choi?" He asked as he walked back toward the door.

He considered telling them about the perceived warning from the General. But old habits died hard. And while he didn't see these people as "enemies" anymore. He still saw them as threats, as foreign military members. As much as he wanted more people on the same page as him. His training and, even he admitted, indoctrination, stayed his tongue.

"He said he wanted to train up his magic a bit." Amina replied. "Pretty sure that he was out in the training yard with Veliry."

"Thanks." Vickers replied as he walked out the door.

They all jumped a bit, and Vickers instinctively dove to a knee near the wall of the hallway outside as an explosion went off. His hands were gripping his rifle and he was scanning the surroundings even though there was nobody there.

"Hell was that?" Sigbert asked.

Kela sniffed the air for a few moments. She hung her head and placed her hand over her snout.

"It was James." She replied with a sigh before beginning to walk out of the room past Vickers. "I'll make sure he isn't dead."

"Pretty sure that's my job now." Vickers said as he jogged to catch up to her.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (164/?)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (163/?)

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Writer's note: A bit more insight on how magic works..... kinda.

Enjoy

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"Okay.... Okay this is the one." James said as he amped himself up. "This time it's gonna work."

"Casting from other body parts is difficult James." Veliry said as she watched him. She'd been watching him attempt the new idea for nearly twenty minutes now. "And I've never heard of anyone casting spells from their feet. Targeting their feet? Sure. I mean I have my tattoos to help me fly, But I do NEED the tattoos to get the focus right."

"Yeah. I wanna learn that too." James countered. "But...." He lifted his leg as he readied a side kick aiming at the dummy across the training yard. "I...." He focused the energy on the sole of his shoe. "Want to be..." His leg shot out. A small puff of fire shot out of the sole of his boot. It only went about a foot before puttering out. James sighed with exasperation. "A fire bender."

"Fire bender?" Veliry asked in confusion.

"It's an old cartoon thing." James said as he hung his head. "It's dumb."

Veliry shook her head a little. "I've heard of some mages learning to use their feet after they lost their arms. And there are a handful of spells that use the feet to interact with the ground beneath a person. Such as the water sense spell. But for attack spells?" She considered for a moment. "It's not common, and it's very difficult."

"But it can be done?" James asked.

Veliry saw the determination in James's face. He was going to continue trying no matter what she said. She sighed deeply.

"I knew a mage a few decades ago. He'd lost his arms to a cursed artifact he'd touched without realizing it." She said. "That's not important. He learned to use SOME spells with his feet and legs." She turned her head at an angle for a moment. "And a few from his stomach."

James's eyes went wide at the idea of a spell bursting from his stomach. He rubbed his absently.

"I asked him how he did it." She continued. "He described it as turning himself upside down." She pointed at James. "But only when it comes to how he manipulated his magical energy. He had to redirect the energy ENTIRELY ignoring the normal route it would take."

"Upside down magical energy manipulation?" James asked.

Veliry spoke before he could continue the thought.

"You've been trying to direct the energy from your hands down to your feet." She said.

"I.... have?" James asked. "I was just trying to get my feet to be the focus of the spell."

"Yes. But you were still routing the energy through your hands first." Her eyes flared with light. He knew that it was the spell that allowed her to see the energy flow through his body. "Thinking of it as 'using your feet to do what your hands do' is causing your energy to bind up all over the place. Do it again." She commanded suddenly. "Just the same."

James was going through the exercise again before he even realized he'd begun following the command.

Veliry interrupted him by grabbing his arm and pressing it against his chest. "Bring the other one in too." She ordered him.

James pulled his left hand in too.

"Now." She said as she looked him in the eye. "You DON'T HAVE ARMS." She said sternly.

James stared at her. Her eyes were still glowing red as she studied his energy flow.

"But..." James began, not really sure of what to say.

"You only have legs." She continued. "So make the legs.... your arms."

James stared at her for a second trying to wrap his head around.

Fuck it. He thought. *I don't know how to do this. I'm just gonna go for it.*

He began drawing in the energy again. He focused it on his feet.

"Wrong." Veliry interrupted. "You're using your hands again."

"What?" He asked, confused. "No I'm not."

"You are. You're still thinking 'Hand spell, but with feet'." She countered. "You don't have arms James. Only legs and feet."

James focused on the energy he was pulling into himself. He visualized his body. He consciously changed the image in his mind and altered it, imagining himself without arms. It was disturbing to say the least, at least to him.

He felt a burning in his arms, especially in the arm pits and elbows.

"That's a start." She said. "Keep moving it out of there. Get it out of your arms."

That ruined the visualization. He felt the heat in his joints build a bit as he got the concept back in his mind. "I don't have arms." He reminded her.

"Perfect." She replied. "Keep going. Remember, it's all about the mind. What you imagine is what your spell will try to be."

It was the mantra she'd taught him months ago when she was having him drill on the wind spell was his first magical spell. It was why, when he had gotten the spell to work back then, it had taken the form of what he now called his pneumatic punch. Because at the time he'd wanted to punch a hole through the enemies. His fire spell looked like a flamethrower, while Amina's looked like a damn welding flame, because he had always imagined fire spells looking like flame throwers.

And now he just needed to imagine shooting that flame thrower out of his foot. And he had to do that by effectively doing "mind over matter" on his visualization process. Or mind of magic? He wasn't sure how to word that in his mind. But he also had to focus on the spell.

That was when an awful, and unfortunately very intrusive, thought entered his mind.

He could feel the heat building in the base of his foot.

"Good. Good." Veliry said as she watched. "You're almost all the way there."

She didn't realize that James was thinking, not of his own will, about all the scenes he'd watched in countless war movies. The scenes with flamethrowers.

He tried to push the thought from his mind.

But it was too late.

James tried to cancel the spell. He also tried to bring his foot down, as if he could stamp out the flames that hadn't even sprouted yet.

Veliry sensed the impending chaos just in time to shield herself.

But James went flying. flipping over several times, in an explosion of flames that erupted from the bottom of his foot.

\----------

Vickers was on a jog when he got the message from General Krick.

He'd been doing PT almost every day since he'd gotten back out of the castle. Before then he hadn't really been able to. It had been obvious, within his first few days on this world, that most of the people here didn't exercise daily. Only the soldiers of the royal army really did any regimented exercising, and even that was mostly combat training. So it had been something he'd had to set aside so that he wouldn't stick out.

But even with the restriction bands on his ankles he'd been happy to have the freedom to actually get some exercise in once they'd let him start going outside to exercise again.

Even if the locals had constantly looked at him like he was a crazy person any time he was running.

He stopped on the path by the dock area for a second as he felt the tablet go off in his CamelBak. He took a sip of the water from the tube as he pulled the tablet off and looked at it.

"\[What the fuck\]?" He asked. "\[Why the hell does he think I'd wanna hear that shit? Man, FUCK THE YANKEES!\]" The surprise and confusion caused by the unexpected message made him yell the exclamation in English. The people around him, going about their day of dock-work, didn't understand what he'd said. But they all looked at him in surprise at the outburst.

He looked around as he noticed the pause he'd caused everyone to take.

"Sorry!" He reassured them. "Just got some bad news. No big deal."

A few people grumbled, but business resumed as usual.

Then the dual message, sent to both him and Choi, came through.

Suddenly the General's message took on a new light.

Vickers grimaced at the message hidden between the two texts.

"Well fuck." He said as he typed in his reply to the dual three member group text.

>Copy that

Then he turned back toward the part of the city that he knew Choi and the princess had their room at.

"Fuckin' Yankees." He grumbled to himself as he began jogging again.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (163/?)

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It was the mantra she'd taught him months ago when she was having him drill on the wind spell as his first magical spell. It was why, when he had gotten the spell to work back then, it had taken the form of what he now called his pneumatic punch. Because at the time he'd wanted to punch a hole through the enemies. His fire spell looked like a flamethrower, while Amina's looked like a damn welding flame, because he had always imagined fire spells looking like flame throwers.

And now he just needed to imagine shooting that flame thrower out of his foot. And he had to do that by effectively doing "mind over matter" on his visualization process. Or mind over magic? He wasn't sure how to word that in his mind. But he also had to focus on the spell.

That was when an awful, and unfortunately very intrusive, thought entered his mind.

He could feel the heat building in the base of his foot.

"Good. Good." Veliry said as she watched. "You're almost all the way there."

She didn't realize that James was thinking, not of his own will, about all the scenes he'd watched in countless war movies. The scenes with flamethrowers.

He tried to push the thought from his mind.

But it was too late.

James tried to cancel the spell. He also tried to bring his foot down, as if he could stamp out the flames that hadn't even sprouted yet.

Veliry sensed the impending chaos just in time to shield herself.

But James went flying. flipping over several times, in an explosion of flames that erupted from the bottom of his foot.

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Vickers was on a jog when he got the message from General Krick.

He'd been doing PT almost every day since he'd gotten back out of the castle. Before then he hadn't really been able to. It had been obvious, within his first few days on this world, that most of the people here didn't exercise daily. Only the soldiers of the royal army really did any regimented exercising, and even that was mostly combat training. So it had been something he'd had to set aside so that he wouldn't stick out.

But even with the restriction bands on his ankles he'd been happy to have the freedom to actually get some exercise in once they'd let him start going outside to exercise again.

Even if the locals had constantly looked at him like he was a crazy person any time he was running.

He stopped on the path by the dock area for a second as he felt the tablet go off in his CamelBak. He took a sip of the water from the tube as he pulled the tablet off and looked at it.

"\[What the fuck?\]" He asked. "\[Why the hell does he think I'd wanna hear that shit? Man, FUCK THE YANKEES!\]" The surprise and confusion caused by the unexpected message made him yell the exclamation in English. The people around him, going about their day of dock-work, didn't understand what he'd said. But they all looked at him in surprise at the outburst.

He looked around as he noticed the pause he'd caused everyone to take.

"Sorry!" He reassured them. "Just got some bad news. No big deal."

A few people grumbled, but business resumed as usual.

Then the dual message, sent to both him and Choi, came through.

Suddenly the General's message took on a new light.

Vickers grimaced at the message hidden between the two texts.

"Well fuck." He said as he typed in his reply to the dual three member group text.

>Copy that

Then he turned back toward the part of the city that he knew Choi and the princess had their room at.

"Fuckin' Yankees." He grumbled to himself as he began jogging again.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (162/?)

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Yeah the military does that too. Only they do it way worse.

Enjoy.

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"Dude. No head plume." Vickers said as James tried on a helmet that looked like a combination of a Roman helmet and Iron Man's face plate. "Also, there's no way you can see anything in there."

James removed the helmet, gasping a bit as he did. "I can also barely breath in it." He admitted. "Smells like barbecue too."

"Can't believe you lost your entire set of armor." Vickers chastised him again.

"IN A FIGHT!" James reminded him. "Against weird monsters that made it disappear. Lucky it didn't get me too."

"Wasn't that like... your first time wearing it in a fight?" Vickers asked.

"Yes." James replied. "Yes it was. And thank you for reminding me. It definitely wasn't expensive or anything." He picked up a helmet that looked almost reminded him of a baseball helmet, only with a metal cage coming down over the face. "Wait. Why are you here? I thought we were over the whole 'shadowing me' thing."

"Meh. I've been getting bored as shit." Vickers admitted. "Plus I kinda want to see about a set of leg armor that's better for when I'm riding Tom. The ones I have um.... chaff."

James pointed at the sign over a section of the armor shop that said "riding armor".

"I know you can read that." James said flatly.

Vickers looked around for a moment. The shop keeper was busy talking to a dwarf about the quality of a pair of shoulder guards on the other side. He bit his lip as he nodded a bit.

Then he spoke in English.

\["Go ahead and put the medallion away."\] He said as he pointed at the green necklace that was effectively James's credit card in this world.

Curious, James quickly slid the medallion in the bottomless back he was wearing as a satchel.

"\[Why are we talking in English?\]" He asked.

"\[Because I think something's going on with our command structure.\]" Vickers answered casually.

"\[What!\]" James asked, surprised at the statement.

"\[When was the last time you heard from command?\]" Vickers asked. "\[And I don't mean your therapist. I mean an actual order, or a command or hell, a request for more intel or something. When was the last time they did more than ask you how the weather was?\]"

James had to think for a moment. Now that Vickers mentioned it, they had been oddly quiet the past few weeks.

"\[Last thing I can think of is setting up that steel box.\]" Vickers said, beating him to the punch. "\[Other than that, we aint been doin shit besides soaking up the scenery. You'd expect em to at least order us back to the capital, or schmooze some world leaders or something. Anything really.\]"

"\[Aaaaand you think that's a problem?\]" James asked. "\[Personally, I think it's awesome. I hated having them breathing down my neck.\]"

"\[That's the problem.\]" Vickers countered. "\[I don't know. It's one thing to have no contact at all. Comms goin down. A situation where they need radio silence. Something like that.\]" He pointed at James. "\[But

you DO have contact. And they're using it to say and do a whole lot of nothing.\]" He shrugged a bit while tilting his head to the side. "\[I don't like it is all.\]"

James had to admit that the SEAL was right. He had wondered what their next move was for some while. He knew Amina wanted to stay and fix the city some more. But her uncle could do that. And, barring the occasional coughed up bit of ashen phlegm, Kela was pretty much back on her feet now. Alixan was already gone, and Veliry was basically doing the same thing James and Vickers were.

It was like everyone was waiting for the Blight to make the next move.

Or maybe the Agency. Assuming they were still alive.

"\[What do you think is going on?\]" James asked, deferring to the older, more experienced operator.

"\[Like I said.\]" Vickers answered as he held up a breastplate in front of James's chest and shook his head slightly. "\[I don't know. But all the times that this kind of thing has happened before while I was on mission... It usually meant that the rules were being rewritten without me or my boys' input.\]"

James thought about the implication as he continued shopping for a new set of armor. After a few minutes, he spoke again.

"\[Wait.\]" He said, getting Vickers attention as the SEAL actually tried on some of the riding armor. "\[Did you just like... help me?\]" He looked at Vickers who was wearing a confused expression. "\[You know. like.... the way an NCO or XO would help their CO.\]"

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In the room below Secretary Grant was walking around with the Colonel and a few of the technicians, plus a suit wearing goon that the General

was certain was secret service. They were showing him the machines that allowed them to open up the doorway.

He was tempted to ask a few of the nearby techs to activate it. But he knew better.

He hated the suits.

The General took a deep breath and let it out in a sigh as he looked down at the tablet in his hand. The message to Choi and Vickers.

>Return to Capital immediately.Stand down until such time as extraction is possible.No further actions authorized unless necessary to secure summoning room access at time of extraction, or for self defense.Take no further actions with local government(s).

He knew that the message was wrong. He also knew that Vickers would follow it to the letter, and that Choi would not.

Hell, Choi couldn't. He was tied to that world in a Gordian Knot of relationships at this point. Even his blood was likely to rebel against him if they brought him back to Earth.

The general's knuckles were white with the grip he had on the tablet in his hand.

He looked down at the Secretary of defense again. The smug bastard was joking with one of the soldiers guarding the room below as if they were old friends. The young Sergeant was likely uncomfortable from rubbing elbows with a D.C. big wig.

General Krick hit the send button. Then he looked around and made sure that no one was watching as he quickly, and discreetly sent an E-mail to the Colonel.

He wrote one more message to Vickers. One he hoped would warn both of them.

>Yankees look good to win the series.

He hit the send button before he could rethink the decision.

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Writer's note: Alaskan summers are gorgeous. Hope y'all are enjoying your summers too.

Enjoy.

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Vickers sat atop one of the newly repaired sections of the wall drinking a cup of the coffee that Choi had convinced one of local cafe's to brew for them. The style of drink wasn't catching on quite as much as any of the other recipes he'd let loose on this world. But Vickers had a cup of something that could almost pass as a gas station's weakest brew, which was a vast improvement over the way the locals normally drank it.

He'd made a habit over the past two months of sitting on different parts of the wall and just kind of... watching.

He wanted to say that he was watching for threats. But that wouldn't be entirely accurate. Even before the repairs had gotten halfway done General Sigbert had posted the guards back up top. Choi's fiance had also had the Earth-made arrows positioned at numerous points in case anything happened.

Plus the blighted area was far enough away that he couldn't even see any of it.

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He'd also, at least in theory, blown up this world's version of the illuminati. He'd definitely killed at least one of them. And that weird Golem thing.

But the locals had pretty much taken over the investigation afterwords. He couldn't fault them, they were the ones who had beef with the Agency. Beside which he had only minimal understanding of the magic in this world, so he couldn't exactly do anything with the doors that had been down there.

On top of all of that, Command had gone incredibly silent. Choi hadn't noticed it, and he couldn't blame the guy. He had a lot on his mind right now. But General Krick hadn't sent down so much as a single word since the battle. Neither had the Colonel. In fact his last order had been set up that box with Choi. Before that HIS last order had been to find Choi after the battle had ended.

That one had been two weeks ago.

He was accustomed to standing by. He was accustomed to operations that required sitting on his ass for weeks, or even months, at a time. Hell, he couldn't think of many times in his service where he wasn't doing at least a little bit of "Stand by to stand by."

But this was different. It wasn't just that they'd unexpectedly gone quiet. They'd hooked Choi up with a therapist after all. It was that the silence was odd given the circumstances.

This was a new world. Before they'd been asking for data on damn near everything. Hell, his first week in this world the Colonel had had to chew out a botanist who'd been constantly requesting that Vickers stop and sniff every single plant he came across. She'd had to remind the scientist that botany and biology weren't what Vickers was here for. He'd still snapped a few pics of some of the more interesting plants he'd seen. He wasn't heartless after all, and they were just trying to do THEIR job.

Regardless. There was just something DIFFERENT about this current communication black out that seemed to be occurring. One that he didn't like.

It gave him a feeling that he'd had on a few of his night time dives over the years. That feeling of things occurring just outside of his field of view. On the dives it had been fish, rays, sharks, and other sea creatures probably just curious about the wet suit wearing apes that

were unexpectedly in their environment. But all the other times he'd had this feeling while "on mission" it had always been because the higher ups had been doing shady shit.

He hated when other people did shady shit. He was the one that was supposed to be doing that stuff to other people. And he hated it when it happened around him, but not under his control.

His thoughts were interrupted by the screams and laughter of some of the children below. A small group of them were engaging in that classic winter pastime that seemed multiversal, snowball fights. A group of them were taking cover in one of the half destroyed buildings while the rest laid siege to them. He watched a lanky orc build snowballs the size of basketballs and use both of its arms to launch them at the kids in the building. He saw an odd avian-like child with four arms use both sets to engage in rapid fire run and gun snowballing.

He chuckled as he saw one of the kids in the building nail the orc with a precision shot to the face that caused it to drop its current projectile on its own head.

Almost by reflex he scooped up a handful of snow from next to where he was sitting and compacted it into a snowball. He was about to chuck it into the fray when he looked at it.

The snow it was made of was grey from all the ash that had fallen from the bombs. He looked back down at the kids playing some fifty or sixty feet below and realized that he'd been seeing the grey the entire time, and had simply tuned it out. Like a bad, but eternal, unrelenting smell. Or like the tinnitus that he'd had since he'd gone on his first deployment years ago.

He turned back to look at the land outside of the city. The wasteland only stopped about a quarter of a mile away. The snow there was darker than anywhere else, and also lower than the stuff inside the walls.

The image was different. But he remembered the hard times after the wars. He was thankful that this strike had gone well.

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Enjoy

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"You sure you're up for this dude?" James asked as he watched Alixan slowly, and gingerly, don what was left of his armor.

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She was still heavily bandaged, but she was mobile now. Her hand was almost completely regrown. James noticed that she also had a few patches of scales around the base of her ears. He'd asked her about them, and she'd told him that her ears had been extremely itchy during the healing process, so she was just trying to speed it up.

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"So a few days to assess that, maybe a week." He continued the train of thought. "Call it a month and a half at the absolute earliest." He said. "But it'll probably be closer to two. And that's just for the griffin riders. The footmen and cavalry will probably take at least three months, and that's if they're running."

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"He did." Amina confirmed. "Though Icegale can't mobilize in force until spring." She said. The rest of them, minus James, nodded in understanding. "And we should see the ships from the Strait arrive sometime at the end of the month."

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"Probably not." He said as he finished putting on the first boot. "But I've been through worse pains to ride a griffin. This will pass."

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When he was done, and the boot was up Alixan froze.

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"Aye sir." The dwarf responded. "Why?"

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"You said you threw this at one of them?" James asked Amina several hours later in their room.

In his hands was the mangled pistol that had once belonged to Sergeant Odekowe. The polymer loop of the trigger guard was bent inward. The grip had a long crack on the left side that ran from where the magazine was inserted, all the way up to where the magazine release button was. The slide was locked back and actually partially off its track on the right side. There was a bent, empty, magazine sticking out of the mag well.

"I had... run out of ammo." Amina admitted bashfully. "One of them was about to vanish one of the mages in our group. I didn't see an alternative."

"Did it..... did it work?" James asked, still gawking at the damage she'd done. "Did you hit it?"

Amina scoffed lightly. "Of course I hit it James." She said, sounding offended. "And it worked. I was able to close the distance and kill it before it had recovered."

"How hard did you throw it?" He asked as he pulled his cleaning kit and multitool from his bag.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (160/?)

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Writer's note: I didn't do one of these notes yesterday.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (159/?)

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"Sweet. Wanna grab the tools and I'll start positioning these things?" James asked as he helped the soldiers of the construction squad begin moving the plates.

"Yeah, they should be in the third wagon." Vickers said as he began jogging to get them.

The plates themselves reminded James of the metal plates that construction crews would lay over potholes and trenches when they were working on the roads. Each plate was almost ten feet in each direction and had a series of holes around their edges. Five of the plates had central holes as well. The last plate had a circle of holes around a slightly larger central hole.

To say they weighed a ton probably wasn't an exaggeration, James knew. But his strength had been enhanced by the magic inherent to this world and so while the plates were heavy they didn't feel anywhere near as burdensome as he knew they should have. He guessed that they would probably be moved by cranes or winches of some kind back on earth. But here in Petravus they were capable of being lifted by only four to six people. James couldn't help but marvel at the notion that he had to be lifting several hundred pounds and yet only felt as though he was lifting maybe a hundred.

The first plate went under the patch of blight they'd chosen, one that was hovering a few inches off the ground now that the area had been destroyed by the bombs. This plate had a hole in the middle and a long, screw-like, anchor was driven into the ground through it, effectively anchoring it to the ground. Once it was in place James used his fire magic to carefully weld the two pieces together so that they wouldn't move at all.

Next a series of L and T shaped brackets were bolted into the holes along the edge of the plate forming the corner edges of the massive cube structure. Once these were attached the side plates, or walls, were slid into the brackets and also bolted into place. Just like before James, with the help of Veliry, used his magic to weld the pieces together.

The holes in the side walls were used to attach long, thick, chains to the sides of the structure. These chains were all long enough to reach roughly ten to fifteen yards out from the structure and were anchored in a similar fashion to the central plate. Veliry used her magic to compact the dirt around them into a more solid state, adding weight to the anchors and making it harder for them to be removed.

Once the walls were in place and secure the process was repeated with the "roof" of the structure. Then James and Vickers worked together to assemble and install a small, solar powered, surveillance camera through the hole on the top. It slid in easily and the bolts were designed to expand their housing once tightened into their holes. The end result was that a small camera was inside the cube, and a small pole with a solar panel and transmitter antennae sticking a few feet up off of the cube.

This camera relayed its signal directly to a large transmitter that James and Vickers had set up a mile away outside of the blighted area. This in turn was linked with the newly reformed drone chain to the capital. Any of them with tablets, or in James's case a phone, or at the communication hub at the castle could watch the footage of the inside of the cube. It would also alert all of them if anything inside the cube decided to move.

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By the time they were done building the container it was nearly dark. The wagons that had carried the material had long since departed for Jadesport. Amina had taken a contingent of the city guards she'd brought with them off to the side and begun drilling them on target practice with the new arrows. The rest of the city guards remained on watch with their bows and the arrows that had come from Earth. If anything came from the patch of blight they would help protect the construction crew.

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"Any changes in atmosperic pressure inside the box?" General Krick asked. "I mean. I know the box probably isn't air tight. Just curious. Is that thing sucking air in?"

"Seems to be the same inside and outside the box sir." The tech answered. "Difference is marginal at best, could simply be caused by a

temp difference because it's colder inside. But we'll keep monitoring it and see if there's any long term change."

"Good." The General replied. "Is the drop ready?"

"Any time sir."

"Well, aint like we have any reason NOT to do it." He said. "Go ahead."

One of the other techs input a command and set it in motion.

Back in the steel cube surrounding the patch of blight, the camera hanging from the ceiling began to lower on a thin steel braided cable that also housed the camera's wiring. The small motor whirred as it spun the small drum of cable out of the metal pipe that the camera was housed in.

Everyone in the control room watched as the mysterious blight inched closer to the camera's point of view.

Then it crossed into it and data began flowing into the control room.

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"There they are." Master Sergeant Nguyen said as he looked through the scope he'd brought with him. He pointed at the map that Doctor Cardosa was looking at. "Those are the mountains surrounding the desert."

The group had been traveling for months now and he knew that they were struggling. Not all of them were military. The doctor, for example, was actually a civilian contractor who had been chosen for her experience with infectious diseases in third world countries as well as her skill as a translator. She was there not just to keep them patched up, but also to keep them from accidentally infecting, or being infected by, this world. Luckily THAT hadn't been an issue so far.

They'd been on the road for almost five months now. And even though it had gotten warmer as they'd gotten closer to the mountains, it was still cold. Corporal Reeves was lying bundled up in the carriage they'd obtained trying to work his way through a cold that the doctor suspected might turn into pneumonia if they didn't stop soon and let him recover. They actually planned on stopping at the next town for a week or so so that he could.

But that wouldn't change the fact that they'd grown road weary and needed to either stop, or get to their destination soon. They only had another month and a half before the General would be sending over the first beacon through the door location that they'd estimated would drop it in the elevated, secluded, desert.

He looked through the scope again, looking at the mountain range eagerly.

Then he snapped the straps of the horses reins and got them moving again.

There was a town only another day or two ahead, and they needed to get there.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (159/?)

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Back in the steel cube surrounding the patch of blight, the camera hanging from the ceiling began to lower on a thin steel braided cable that also housed the camera's wiring. The small motor whirred as it spun the small drum of cable out of the metal pipe that the camera was housed in.

Everyone in the control room watched as the mysterious blight inched closer to the camera's point of view.

Then it crossed into it and data began flowing into the control room.

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"There they are." Master Sergeant Nguyen said as he looked through the scope he'd brought with him. He pointed at the map that Doctor Cardosa was looking at. "Those are the mountains surrounding the desert."

The group had been traveling for months now and he knew that they were struggling. Not all of them were military. The doctor, for example, was actually a civilian contractor who had been chosen for her experience with infectious diseases in third world countries as well as her skill as a translator. She was there not just to keep them patched up, but also to keep them from accidentally infecting, or being infected by, this world. Luckily THAT hadn't been an issue so far.

They'd been on the road for almost five months now. And even though it had gotten warmer as they'd gotten closer to the mountains, it was still cold. Corporal Reeves was lying bundled up in the carriage they'd obtained trying to work his way through a cold that the doctor suspected might turn into pneumonia if they didn't stop soon and let him recover. They actually planned on stopping at the next town for a week or so so that he could.

But that wouldn't change the fact that they'd grown road weary and needed to either stop, or get to their destination soon. They only had another month and a half before the General would be sending over the first beacon through the door location that they'd estimated would drop it in the elevated, secluded, desert.

He looked through the scope again, looking at the mountain range eagerly.

Then he snapped the straps of the horses reins and got them moving again.

There was a town only another day or two ahead, and they needed to get there.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/v4dcy0/wait_is_this_just_gate_160/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (158/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/v22wah/wait_is_this_just_gate_157/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: "Gotta love logistics." -Nobody *(until they run out of supplies mid fight)*

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Wait, is this just GATE? (158/?)

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Writer's note: I had a great camping weekend, hope y'all did the same. I am tired AF though. Lots o' hiking.

Enjoy.

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"So. Tell me again..." James prompted as he and Alixan sat, drinking tea in Kela's recovery room. "How did your shield hold up after you passed out?"

The crown prince snacked on a small cookie that he'd dipped in the brown jam nearby. His face was still mostly covered in the multicolored scales that the burn salve caused. But bits of it had flaked away and were showing his normal, albeit raw looking, skin again.

"It's a technique Arch Mage Marcos showed me back when I was a child. A way to channel energy into your shield spell, sort of like um.... over filling it with energy. You also have to focus your willpower on longevity." He produced a small flame in the palm of his hand, no larger

than the flame of a candle, and held it up. He focused for a moment then, slowly, lowered his hand. The flame stayed in place, hovering in the air. Then he turned back to talk to James again. James looked at the flame, amazed. "You have to will the spell to hold in place beyond its normal limitations." His face showed strain for a moment. "It's difficult, and takes a lot of energy to get it to do any more than a few seconds." As if on cue, the flame sputtered for a moment. "But if you can build enough up, and focus enough, you can create spells that last hours, or even days. If you focus it INTO an object." He made a point of looking at James's sword. "Also known as enchanting. Then you can make it borderline indefinite."

"And that let you keep the shield up even after you were unconscious?" James asked. His mind reeled at the thought of keeping a spell up even after it had finished being cast.

"Like I said; Marcos trained me extensively on it." He answered. "It took months before I could even get a spell to last a few seconds past passing out." He rubbed his throat as if remembering something uncomfortable there. "Years before I could get it to last more than a few minutes. I still train on it from time to time, though I.... don't like to." He shifted uncomfortably, still clutching his throat. "Amina got the same training, though she's not as good as I am at magic." He said, gesturing at the Princess's sleeping form slumped in a chair in the corner. She'd been working nonstop for nearly two weeks now. Alixan had only barely begun helping a few days earlier when his hands had healed enough to hold a pen, albeit very gently.

James thought he understood. Though he kind of hoped he didn't.

"Wha?" A sudden, weak, voice suddenly asked, surprising both of them. "Where... am I?"

James helped Alixan out of his chair and over to the side of the bed, then he ran to the door and called for the healers before running back to Kela's side.

It had been days since James had first seen Kela in the bed here at the hospital. She was still almost completely bandaged, though her ears and tail were almost completely regrown. Her hand, which had been disappeared by the blight and amputated so that it could regenerate, had almost regrown its entire palm. Her werewolf biology allowing her to recover more efficiently than the other non-werewolves who'd been injured in the battle.

"Relax Kel." Alixan said gently as she struggled to get up. He placed a gently restraining hand on her shoulder, wincing as he was painfully reminded of his own burns."Stay down."

"What in the hells happened?" She asked as she leaned back down. "Xan? What's on your face?" Only one of her eyes was open. They'd both been badly damaged by the heat of the bombs. She held her hand up and looked at the half healed stub that was there. "Where am I?"

"Kela relax." James said. "You're in Jadesport. At the hospital."

"James?" She asked, looking for him. Her eye locked onto him as he got to her. She seemed to relax a bit, settling a bit more. Suddenly she began struggling again."Where's Amina? Where's Gixelle? She was with me." James and Alixan exchanged a glance at the mention of Gixelle.

"I'm..." Amina began as she finally woke up at the sound of her name. "I'm here." She said. "What's ha-Kela!" She exclaimed as she woke up fully and ran to join the James at the side of the bed.

"We won?" Kela asked. "We got them? What's happening with the blight? How long have I been out?" She looked down at her bandages. "Luna Rose bandages? How badly was I hurt?"

"Pretty badly." Said the healer that was on shift at the moment as they entered the room. "Burns pretty much on your entire body. A missing hand." The large, though skinny, orc said as he walked up. "And a few broken bones, though not too many."

He waved the James and Amina away from the bedside. They stepped back, but stayed close.

"How are you Captain?" He asked as he began checking her bandages and peering at her with eyes that glowed. "Do you know where you are?"

"James said that we're in Jadesport." She answered.

"That's right." He replied. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"I was on Maxel, riding behind Gixelle as we retreated. There was this massive fireball that was coming towards us." Kela recalled.

"Good. Good." The healer assured her. "That's what we'd been told happened. Now. How are you feeling? The bandages should be keeping the pain in check. And as a werewolf they should also be speeding things up quite a bit. So I need to know if you're in any severe pain right now. If so we may have to redo some of them or adjust the potency of the bandage solution."

Kela admitted to some pain in her back and left foot and the healer swept his glowing eyes to those locations while jotting down notes on a notepad that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere.

James motioned to the other two and they moved to step outside.

"Wait!" Kela exclaimed, stopping them. "What happened to Gixelle? Is she okay?" She asked, holding the healer aside with her one good hand. He looked undisturbed by the interruption.

Amina stepped forward and gently pressed her friend back into the bed, pulling her hand from the healer's shoulder and holding it in her own. The two of them locked eyes, Amina's good eye looking directly into Kela's only eye.

"Later." She said firmly.

That was all it took.

Kela seemed to deflate. The meaning of the single word statement seemed obvious to James as soon as he'd heard it.

And apparently Kela understood too. She laid back down and relaxed. But they could all see the crestfallen look on her face. Her still bandaged ears drooped a little, though the bandages kept them from pressing all the way back.

"Later." She said softly as she did. "Heal now, talk later."

Amina stood up straight and walked out of the room. She grabbed James's hand as she reached him and squeezed it firmly.

James looked at Kela one last time before they exited, and saw his own sorrow, which he was still working through, mirrored in her lupine features.

"We'll bring you some food later when the doctor's done with the checks okay." He said before the door closed.

Kela just hung her head as she went back to answering the questions from the healer.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (157/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I had a great camping weekend, hope y'all did the same. I am tired AF though. Lots o' hiking.

Enjoy.

\~

"So. Tell me again..." James prompted as he and Alixan sat, drinking tea in Kela's recovery room. "How did your shield hold up after you passed out?"

The crown prince snacked on a small cookie that he'd dipped in the brown jam nearby. His face was still mostly covered in the multicolored scales that the burn salve caused. But bits of it had flaked away and were showing his normal, albeit raw looking, skin again.

"It's a technique Arch Mage Marcos showed me back when I was a child. A way to channel energy into your shield spell, sort of like um.... over filling it with energy. You also have to focus your willpower on longevity." He produced a small flame in the palm of his hand, no larger than the flame of a candle, and held it up. He focused for a moment then, slowly, lowered his hand. The flame stayed in place, hovering in the air. Then he turned back to talk to James again. James looked at the flame, amazed. "You have to will the spell to hold in place beyond its normal limitations." His face showed strain for a moment. "It's difficult, and takes a lot of energy to get it to do any more than a few seconds." As if on cue, the flame sputtered for a moment. "But if you can build enough up, and focus enough, you can create spells that last hours, or even days. If you focus it INTO an object." He made a point of looking at James's sword. "Also known as enchanting. Then you can make it borderline indefinite."

"And that let you keep the shield up even after you were unconscious?" James asked. His mind reeled at the thought of keeping a spell up even after it had finished being cast.

"Like I said; Marcos trained me extensively on it." He answered. "It took months before I could even get a spell to last a few seconds past passing out." He rubbed his throat as if remembering something uncomfortable there. "Years before I could get it to last more than a few minutes. I still train on it from time to time, though I.... don't like to." He shifted uncomfortably, still clutching his throat. "Amina got the same training, though she's not as good as I am at magic." He said, gesturing at the Princess's sleeping form slumped in a chair in the corner. She'd been working nonstop for nearly two weeks now. Alixan had only barely begun helping a few days earlier when his hands had healed enough to hold a pen, albeit very gently.

James thought he understood. Though he kind of hoped he didn't.

"Wha?" A sudden, weak, voice suddenly asked, surprising both of them. "Where... am I?"

James helped Alixan out of his chair and over to the side of the bed, then he ran to the door and called for the healers before running back to Kela's side.

It had been days since James had first seen Kela in the bed here at the hospital. She was still almost completely bandaged, though her ears and tail were almost completely regrown. Her hand, which had been disappeared by the blight and amputated so that it could regenerate, had almost regrown its entire palm. Her werewolf biology allowing her to recover more efficiently than the other non-werewolves who'd been injured in the battle.

"Relax Kel." Alixan said gently as she struggled to get up. He placed a gently restraining hand on her shoulder, wincing as he was painfully reminded of his own burns."Stay down."

"What in the hells happened?" She asked as she leaned back down. "Xan? What's on your face?" Only one of her eyes was open. They'd both been badly damaged by the heat of the bombs. She held her hand up and looked at the half healed stub that was there. "Where am I?"

"Kela relax." James said. "You're in Jadesport. At the hospital."

"James?" She asked, looking for him. Her eye locked onto him as he got to her. She seemed to relax a bit, settling a bit more. Suddenly she began struggling again."Where's Amina? Where's Gixelle? She was with me." James and Alixan exchanged a glance at the mention of Gixelle.

"I'm..." Amina began as she finally woke up at the sound of her name. "I'm here." She said. "What's ha-Kela!" She exclaimed as she woke up fully and ran to join the James at the side of the bed.

"We won?" Kela asked. "We got them? What's happening with the blight? How long have I been out?" She looked down at her bandages. "Luna Rose bandages? How badly was I hurt?"

"Pretty badly." Said the healer that was on shift at the moment as they entered the room. "Burns pretty much on your entire body. A missing hand." The large, though skinny, orc said as he walked up. "And a few broken bones, though not too many."

He waved the James and Amina away from the bedside. They stepped back, but stayed close.

"How are you Captain?" He asked as he began checking her bandages and peering at her with eyes that glowed. "Do you know where you are?"

"James said that we're in Jadesport." She answered.

"That's right." He replied. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"I was on Maxel, riding behind Gixelle as we retreated. There was this massive fireball that was coming towards us." Kela recalled.

"Good. Good." The healer assured her. "That's what we'd been told happened. Now. How are you feeling? The bandages should be keeping the pain in check. And as a werewolf they should also be speeding things up quite a bit. So I need to know if you're in any severe pain right now. If so we may have to redo some of them or adjust the potency of the bandage solution."

Kela admitted to some pain in her back and left foot and the healer swept his glowing eyes to those locations while jotting down notes on a notepad that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere.

James motioned to the other two and they moved to step outside.

"Wait!" Kela exclaimed, stopping them. "What happened to Gixelle? Is she okay?" She asked, holding the healer aside with her one good hand. He looked undisturbed by the interruption.

Amina stepped forward and gently pressed her friend back into the bed, pulling her hand from the healer's shoulder and holding it in her own. The two of them locked eyes, Amina's good eye looking directly into Kela's only eye.

"Later." She said firmly.

That was all it took.

Kela seemed to deflate. The meaning of the single word statement seemed obvious to James as soon as he'd heard it.

And apparently Kela understood too. She laid back down and relaxed. But they could all see the crestfallen look on her face. Her still bandaged ears drooped a little, though the bandages kept them from pressing all the way back.

"Later." She said softly as she did. "Heal now, talk later."

Amina stood up straight and walked out of the room. She grabbed James's hand as she reached him and squeezed it firmly.

James looked at Kela one last time before they exited, and saw his own sorrow, which he was still working through, mirrored in her lupine features.

"We'll bring you some food later when the doctor's done with the checks okay." He said before the door closed.

Kela just hung her head as she went back to answering the questions from the healer.

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James looked down at the tablet anxiously.

He'd talked to the people back home and let them know that he was having some issues. The Colonel had actually been the one he'd spoken to. She'd been far more understanding than he'd expected. Apparently they'd known, likely from Vickers, that he was struggling with what had happened.

She'd put a counselor on the communication hub and the counselor had recorded themselves asking some questions. Things like; had he been injured, had he lost anyone close to him, was he sleeping alright, was he eating, was he drinking (water or alcohol), and other things like that. She also encouraged him to talk about anything he wanted to. She left the end of the questions open ended and implored him to simply verbalize whatever he was feeling or thinking, whether it made sense or not. All the questions were asked in a gentle manner, as if he could refuse any of them if he wanted to, and he was sure that he could if he wanted to.

James.... didn't know.... what he was feeling. He answered the straight forward questions at first.

He had been injured. In fact his shoulder still hurt.

He had seen people hurt and killed, and one of them had been a good friend.

Now that he thought about it, he wasn't sleeping. Not really. The past few days he'd slept at most three or four hours. The rest of the time he'd just been laying in the bed he'd found, wide awake and overthinking.

He was honest about the mostly liquor based diet.

He answered all of them in order. By the time he got to the open ended questions, and the prompt to open up, he was wide open. He let it all out, struggling not to hyperventilate as he did. He admitted the guilt he felt.

He felt raw afterwords. His only consolation was that he didn't actually have the counselor actively talking to him. The delay from the drone relay meant that he probably wouldn't for a few hours. It actually made him feel better. He didn't think he wanted to have someone giving him feedback right now. He just... needed to talk. And he didn't want to put another burden like that on Amina, even though he knew she would take it if he asked.

He was just finishing the recording, and was wondering whether he should delete it and redo it. He didn't want command to think that he was unstable or something.

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He eagerly opened the message and hit play.

"HEY JAMESY!" His little brother blurted in his enthusiastic voice. "It's me, Joey! You already know that." James noticed his brother looking at the camera more often than he usually would, and he smiled even wider. He knew Joey had been working on his eye contact, and that his virtual tutor had been using camera's as an aide, since Joey had even struggled with them as well.

"Hey Jojo." James said, even though he knew that his little brother wouldn't hear him.

"The General asked Mom and I to record a message for you." Joey continued. "Mom's a little busy talking to him about it right now. but she'll be here soon. He said that you might not be feeling to great right now. It seemed like he might have been trying to hide the fact that something bad happened. I hope that that's not the case. But if it is, I know you'll be okay." Joey looked back at the camera again. "But, I figured if you are feeling a little upset I should probably let you know that I think I have an idea of how you can use your magic to do some cool stuff, since the general let us see a video of you using it on some targets. Still can't believe you can do ACTUAL MAGIC."

James listened as his brother began rattling off ideas.

His brother knew him a little too well he thought. Because he was right. Seeing how excited he was about James's magic, and hearing him rattle off ideas (a couple of which he thought were actually pretty good) made James completely forget about things even if he knew it was only temporary.

He watched his brother continue almost uninterrupted for nearly ten minutes before his mom showed up on camera.

By the time his mother took over his brother had somehow branched out to a video game that some of the soldiers had set up in one of the break rooms and how a character in it had had a spell like James's earth manipulation.

By then he was smiling from ear to ear.

"Hey mijo." His mom interrupted, placing a hand over Joey's forearm for just a moment. "The General told me what happened. I'm sorry about your friend." Joey looked at her surprised, and clearly upset, at the new information.

Even though the tone of the video changed, and reminded James of what he'd been trying NOT to think of for a moment. It was nice to hear his mom's voice.

"I know..." His mom continued. "I know what you're going through right now." She took a deep breath. "Your father.... He... had times like this. Times when it was.... difficult, impossible even, to know if he'd done the right thing. If he'd done enough. It's an impossible question to answer." She smiled weakly. "Don't try to answer it mijo. You're here. You're okay. Take your time." She put a hand on Joey's shoulder and shook him a bit before wrapping her arm around hm. "The General said he had someone for you to talk to. But... if you don't want to talk to them, or if you want to talk to us instead. We're here. And we're glad that you're okay."

She shifted gears on a dime. "Now when are you and Amina getting married and giving me grand kids?"

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Wait, is this just GATE? (156/?)

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Writer's note: Yaaaaaay bureaucracy.

Enjoy

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James had expected Alixan to be bedridden and covered in bandages, much like he had been several times since coming here. At best he thought the prince might be in a wheelchair, which he did know they had here, but still wrapped in bandages.

He did not expect what appeared to be a massive insect man sitting in a chair next to the window wearing a bath robe.

"WHAT THE SHIT!" James exclaimed as he darted back out of the door. "Sorry! Wrong room!" He said once he was outside.

"Captain Choi?" The 'person' said in a raspy, yet familiar voice.

James popped his head back around the edge of the door.

"Alixan?" He asked hesitantly.

The person slowly nodded their head. "Yeah?"

"What..... What happened to you?" James asked, confused.

Alixan looked down at himself and suddenly realized what James was startled by.

"Oh. Gods... That's right. I almost forgot about all of this." He said as he gestured at his head and arms. "These are a uh.... side effect of some kind of experimental salve that Veliry gave them for my burns. The mages

still have a few.... issues... to work out in the formula." He scratched his currently ridged forehead. "Bloody itchy for starters."

James suddenly remembered the scales and horn that Veliry had had on her head, and the bits of scale that the other researchers had been sporting as well.

He emerged fully into the room.

"Good god man." He said in mild disgust. "Did you swim in the stuff?"

Every inch of exposed skin on the prince, his arms, the feet that were visible below the blanket on his lap, his entire head and neck, were all a nearly prismatic mixture of differently colored reptilian scales. His hands looked like a pair of blue and green gator skin gauntlets, even ending in points that were reminiscent of claws. There were ridges along his for head and eyebrows, and a small crest on the top of his head.

In short he looked like someone who couldn't decide if they were dressing up as Godzilla or the swamp thing.

"Just about." The prince replied, ignoring James's stare. "Now I have to admit curiosity. How did you survive unscathed while I ended up like this?" He asked while gesturing at the scales on his face again.

James tried to snap out of his mild awe and disgust.

"I um.... I think Steve laid himself on top of me." James answered. "Last thing I remember was something big, dark, and hairy setting on top of me before I passed out. Next thing I knew Steve was carrying you and I by the backs of out shirts."

The prince seemed to consider this for a moment before saying. "Makes sense I suppose. Between his fireproof body and his fur, it would have kept out a lot of the heat."

"Wait." James interrupted. "How did YOU survive?" He asked.

"Well." He began in response. "That little trick you told me. The one about drawing energy from the fireball." He nodded his head. "That was a damn good trick. I wish I'd thought of it. It let me bolster the shield spell a lot. How'd you come up with that? I mean, I've drawn from fire before. Hell, most mages have. But drawing energy FROM your opponent. That's usually only used against other mages, and most mages are taught to counter it. So it usually isn't really thought of."

"Really?" James asked, surprised at the idea. "Well. Shit. Doing that is the only reason that I survived with the elemental." He shrugged. "Well, that and a lot of really dumb luck." He admitted.

"That actually makes a lot of sense." The prince said, his eyebrows raising in surprise at the revelation.

"Wait." James interrupted again. "That still doesn't explain how you survived. I had Steve on top of me. I'm guessing that you didn't."

"No." Alixan agreed. "No I did not."

"Then how the hell did you survive a thermobaric explosion?" James asked. "Did your griffin save you?"

The prince's face fell a little at the mention of the griffin, and James suddenly had the feeling that he might have said the wrong thing.

"No..." Alixan said after a moment. "No.... Poker didn't save me like Steve did. Although technically he did help, I suppose. That was a technique I learned from Arch Mage Marcos back when I was still learning magic." He said, trying to change the subject. "How to empower a shield beyond your conscious limit."

"Poker... He... He didn't make it.... did he?" James asked.

Alixan shook his head a little. "No. No he didn't. Griffins aren't fireproof like the dragon-kin are."

"I'm.... I'm sorry Alixan. I really am." James replied.

"It's okay." The prince said. "I had a choice. I could extend the shield and try to save him too, but it would have been weaker, and harder to maintain. Or I could just focus on you and I, and it would be stronger, and easier." He nodded. "In the end, I drew enough of his life force into the spell that.... he wouldn't have felt the pain anyways. So... Like I said, he did help."

"You did that for me?" James asked.

"A tiny bit. But not really." Alixan replied.

"What do you mean?"

The prince turned a bit, wincing as he did, and pointed out the nearby window.

"I did it for them James." He said simply. "You ARE the summoned hero. And in your time here, you have become.... a bit of a hero." He said with a slight shrug. "The gods summoned you to help us with the blight. Still don't know how. But if your weapons are that effective against the things that come from it, then I'm thinking they got the right guy."

"Oh hell." James countered. "Anyone from my world can fire a rifle or a pistol."

"True." The prince responded. "But we don't have ANYONE. We have you. And you seem to be doing alright so far."

James didn't know how respond to that.

"Even that's not the real reason I did it." Alixan said, looking out the window.

"Then why did you do it?" James asked.

The prince shrugged. "I like to be the big hero when I can manage it. And swooping in at the last second to save you like that..... Pretty damn dramatic."

James chuckled.

"But also because my sister asked me to." He continued. "And I hate seeing her sad."

Again, James didn't know what to say. One of the hospital orderlies walked in at that moment.

"You might want to leave." She said to James. "Up to you though."

"She's right." Alixan added. "Need more of the salve."

James beat a hasty retreat before he saw anything he didn't want to.

\---

Alixan's semi-draconic, visually insectile, appearance had startled and kind of disgusted James when he'd first seen the prince in his recovery room.

Kela's appearance, on the other hand, filled him with dread.

She had been riding right behind Gixelle on Maxel's back when the fireball had engulfed them. The only reason there had even been recoverable bodies was because they'd managed to get to the end of the explosion's radius. Another hundred yards or so, light work for Maxel, and they'd have been in the clear.

He had seen the devastation that even that had caused to Gixelle's body.

Kela's wasn't much better.

She was covered head to toe in bandages. Though unlike the ones James was accustomed to, these glowed a soft blue. The orderly, some kind of feathered humanoid, warned him not to touch them. They were, according to her, quite toxic to humans. James just thanked her for the warning as she finished changing the wrappings on the stump of Kela's left arm.

"What happened to her arm?" He asked the woman. "Did the explosion do that?'

"No." She said simply. "Based on how it looked, the healers said it was the same as the other ones with bits missin'. But luckily she'd a wolfy. So, we just amputated a few inches higher. For her it'll grow back. the others? Well, they're still workin' on that riddle."

And just like that she finished her job and walked out of the room, a basket full of used bandages under her arm.

James sat in the chair next to her, not sure of what to do.

Her ears were just nubs at the top of her head.

Her tail was completely gone as far as he could tell.

The hand she did still have seemed to be missing fingers.

There wasn't an inch of exposed skin or fur anywhere. Just blue glowing bandages.

He winced every time he heard the slow, weak sounding, raspy breaths that seemed to shake her entire body.

He knew logically, though he considered that oxymoronic, that as a werewolf she would recover from this. It hadn't been magical or caused by silver or any other material that might be toxic to werewolves.

But still, the damage that the missiles had inflicted upon her was ghastly.

It hurt to even look at her, and she wasn't nearly as bad as she had been when he'd gotten to them out in the field. He couldn't imagine the pain she would've been in if she were conscious. He was thankful that she wasn't.

He didn't know what to do, what he even could do.

So he just sat down on the chair and stayed there for a while.

It gave him plenty of time to think of all the things that had happened over the past few weeks. Plus it was quieter than anywhere else in the city.

Before he knew it, he was dozing in the small chair.

\---

"Yes your highness." General Krick said into the communication hub. "Five thousand arrows, straight from earth to you. They're an array of different materials and arrow head styles, basically just what we could get on a moment's notice. But with any luck, they should have the same effect on the anomalous creatures that our missiles, and Captain Choi's weapons had on them."

King Farrick read the interpretation on his side and then responded back.

"Thank you General." He replied. "I can barely fathom how your people can muster so many of them so fast. It truly is remarkable. I'll see to it that these are distributed around the blighted zone as soon as we can get

them there. I hope your theory is right. I also hope that the damnable Blight Possessed bastards don't adapt to the effect that your weaponry had on them previously."

The General read his translation and looked back up. "If it keeps your people, and mine, safe then it's the least we could do. Has there been any new development with this AGENCY organization?"

King Farrick took a deep breath before responding. "Sadly, not much. Our people scoured the area that the creature, and your Chief Vickers, led them to. But the Agency knew that something was coming and covered their tracks very well. A few of our mages are working to figure out these door portals they seem fond of. But we've never seen long distance travel like these. Not with the description of how the Chief described them working anyways."

General Krick nodded, that had pretty much matched with what Vickers had reported to them once the drones had gotten his signal back online.

"Well. Let us know if you, or if Captain Choi or Chief Vickers, can think of anything we can send over to help. We'll do what we can. How is the young Captain anyways? He's been offline these past few days."

It was a fib. Vickers had been keeping tabs on the young soldier on their behalf. But the General wanted to know what the King thought of it.

"According to our people in Jadesport he's been having a rough go of it." The King replied honestly. "I understand that it was his first REAL battle, so we've been letting him have his space. But if he doesn't start picking himself up soon then I might need you folks to talk to him. Might need to hear from someone on your side to help him out."

"That's just about what we expected." General Krick replied with a nod. "Young soldier. First battle, like you said. I'll see about getting a specialist on the line with him whenever he's back online. Probably also get his family in touch with him."

"I think that would be best." The King agree.

"How are your people doing sir?" The General asked.

King Farrick considered the question for a few moments. General Krick was almost concerned that the translation program had malfunctioned when the King began to speak again.

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victory. And I would be remiss not to thank you greatly for those missiles. And these arrows. There's no knowing what would have happened without them."

The General nodded in acknowledgment. "Like I said your highness. If it keeps people safe, yours and mine, then it's the least we can do."

"Either way. Thank you General. If we ever meet, I will owe you some of our finest drinks and food."

"We get this whole door thing figured out and I'll book a ticket." General Krick replied. "Til next time sir." He said as he cut the transmission.

"Well goddam Krick." Said the man who'd been standing in the corner, just out of the camera's view for almost the entire duration of the conversation. He'd entered only a few minutes after it had started. "You've practically got them inviting you to their Bar Mitzvah."

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Seamus Grant took the offered hand and shook it. The General hid his disgust at the limp wristed attempt at a greeting.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (155/?)

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Writer's note: Yaaaaaay bureaucracy.

Enjoy

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James had expected Alixan to be bedridden and covered in bandages, much like he had been several times since coming here. At best he thought the prince might be in a wheelchair, which he did know they had here, but still wrapped in bandages.

He did not expect what appeared to be a massive insect man sitting in a chair next to the window wearing a bath robe.

"WHAT THE SHIT!" James exclaimed as he darted back out of the door. "Sorry! Wrong room!" He said once he was outside.

"Captain Choi?" The 'person' said in a raspy, yet familiar voice.

James popped his head back around the edge of the door.

"Alixan?" He asked hesitantly.

The person slowly nodded their head. "Yeah?"

"What..... What happened to you?" James asked, confused.

Alixan looked down at himself and suddenly realized what James was startled by.

"Oh. Gods... That's right. I almost forgot about all of this." He said as he gestured at his head and arms. "These are a uh.... side effect of some kind of experimental salve that Veliry gave them for my burns. The mages still have a few.... issues... to work out in the formula." He scratched his currently ridged forehead. "Bloody itchy for starters."

James suddenly remembered the scales and horn that Veliry had had on her head, and the bits of scale that the other researchers had been sporting as well.

He emerged fully into the room.

"Good god man." He said in mild disgust. "Did you swim in the stuff?"

Every inch of exposed skin on the prince, his arms, the feet that were visible below the blanket on his lap, his entire head and neck, were all a nearly prismatic mixture of differently colored reptilian scales. His hands looked like a pair of blue and green gator skin gauntlets, even ending in points that were reminiscent of claws. There were ridges along his for head and eyebrows, and a small crest on the top of his head.

In short he looked like someone who couldn't decide if they were dressing up as Godzilla or the swamp thing.

"Just about." The prince replied, ignoring James's stare. "Now I have to admit curiosity. How did you survive unscathed while I ended up like this?" He asked while gesturing at the scales on his face again.

James tried to snap out of his mild awe and disgust.

"I um.... I think Steve laid himself on top of me." James answered. "Last thing I remember was something big, dark, and hairy setting on top of me before I passed out. Next thing I knew Steve was carrying you and I by the backs of out shirts."

The prince seemed to consider this for a moment before saying. "Makes sense I suppose. Between his fireproof body and his fur, it would have kept out a lot of the heat."

"Wait." James interrupted. "How did YOU survive?" He asked.

"Well." He began in response. "That little trick you told me. The one about drawing energy from the fireball." He nodded his head. "That was a damn good trick. I wish I'd thought of it. It let me bolster the shield spell a lot. How'd you come up with that? I mean, I've drawn from fire before. Hell, most mages have. But drawing energy FROM your opponent. That's usually only used against other mages, and most mages are taught to counter it. So it usually isn't really thought of."

"Really?" James asked, surprised at the idea. "Well. Shit. Doing that is the only reason that I survived with the elemental." He shrugged. "Well, that and a lot of really dumb luck." He admitted.

"That actually makes a lot of sense." The prince said, his eyebrows raising in surprise at the revelation.

"Wait." James interrupted again. "That still doesn't explain how you survived. I had Steve on top of me. I'm guessing that you didn't."

"No." Alixan agreed. "No I did not."

"Then how the hell did you survive a thermobaric explosion?" James asked. "Did your griffin save you?"

The prince's face fell a little at the mention of the griffin, and James suddenly had the feeling that he might have said the wrong thing.

"No..." Alixan said after a moment. "No.... Poker didn't save me like Steve did. Although technically he did help, I suppose. That was a technique I learned from Arch Mage Marcos back when I was still learning magic." He said, trying to change the subject. "How to empower a shield beyond your conscious limit."

"Poker... He... He didn't make it.... did he?" James asked.

Alixan shook his head a little. "No. No he didn't. Griffins aren't fireproof like the dragon-kin are."

"I'm.... I'm sorry Alixan. I really am." James replied.

"It's okay." The prince said. "I had a choice. I could extend the shield and try to save him too, but it would have been weaker, and harder to maintain. Or I could just focus on you and I, and it would be stronger, and easier." He nodded. "In the end, I drew enough of his life force into the spell that.... he wouldn't have felt the pain anyways. So... Like I said, he did help."

"You did that for me?" James asked.

"A tiny bit. But not really." Alixan replied.

"What do you mean?"

The prince turned a bit, wincing as he did, and pointed out the nearby window.

"I did it for them James." He said simply. "You ARE the summoned hero. And in your time here, you have become.... a bit of a hero." He said with a slight shrug. "The gods summoned you to help us with the blight. Still don't know how. But if your weapons are that effective against the things that come from it, then I'm thinking they got the right guy."

"Oh hell." James countered. "Anyone from my world can fire a rifle or a pistol."

"True." The prince responded. "But we don't have ANYONE. We have you. And you seem to be doing alright so far."

James didn't know how respond to that.

"Even that's not the real reason I did it." Alixan said, looking out the window.

"Then why did you do it?" James asked.

The prince shrugged. "I like to be the big hero when I can manage it. And swooping in at the last second to save you like that..... Pretty damn dramatic."

James chuckled.

"But also because my sister asked me to." He continued. "And I hate seeing her sad."

Again, James didn't know what to say. One of the hospital orderlies walked in at that moment.

"You might want to leave." She said to James. "Up to you though."

"She's right." Alixan added. "Need more of the salve."

James beat a hasty retreat before he saw anything he didn't want to.

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Alixan's semi-draconic, visually insectile, appearance had startled and kind of disgusted James when he'd first seen the prince in his recovery room.

Kela's appearance, on the other hand, filled him with dread.

She had been riding right behind Gixelle on Maxel's back when the fireball had engulfed them. The only reason there had even been recoverable bodies was because they'd managed to get to the end of the explosion's radius. Another hundred yards or so, light work for Maxel, and they'd have been in the clear.

He had seen the devastation that even that had caused to Gixelle's body.

Kela's wasn't much better.

She was covered head to toe in bandages. Though unlike the ones James was accustomed to, these glowed a soft blue. The orderly, some kind of feathered humanoid, warned him not to touch them. They were, according to her, quite toxic to humans. James just thanked her for the warning as she finished changing the wrappings on the stump of Kela's left arm.

"What happened to her arm?" He asked the woman. "Did the explosion do that?'

"No." She said simply. "Based on how it looked, the healers said it was the same as the other ones with bits missin'. But luckily she'd a wolfy. So, we just amputated a few inches higher. For her it'll grow back. the others? Well, they're still workin' on that riddle."

And just like that she finished her job and walked out of the room, a basket full of used bandages under her arm.

James sat in the chair next to her, not sure of what to do.

Her ears were just nubs at the top of her head.

Her tail was completely gone as far as he could tell.

The hand she did still have seemed to be missing fingers.

There wasn't an inch of exposed skin or fur anywhere. Just blue glowing bandages.

He winced every time he heard the slow, weak sounding, raspy breaths that seemed to shake her entire body.

He knew logically, though he considered that oxymoronic, that as a werewolf she would recover from this. It hadn't been magical or caused by silver or any other material that might be toxic to werewolves.

But still, the damage that the missiles had inflicted upon her was ghastly.

It hurt to even look at her, and she wasn't nearly as bad as she had been when he'd gotten to them out in the field. He couldn't imagine the pain she would've been in if she were conscious. He was thankful that she wasn't.

He didn't know what to do, what he even could do.

So he just sat down on the chair and stayed there for a while.

It gave him plenty of time to think of all the things that had happened over the past few weeks. Plus it was quieter than anywhere else in the city.

Before he knew it, he was dozing in the small chair.

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"Yes your highness." General Krick said into the communication hub. "Five thousand arrows, straight from earth to you. They're an array of different materials and arrow head styles, basically just what we could get on a moment's notice. But with any luck, they should have the same

effect on the anomalous creatures that our missiles, and Captain Choi's weapons had on them."

King Farrick read the interpretation on his side and then responded back.

"Thank you General." He replied. "I can barely fathom how your people can muster so many of them so fast. It truly is remarkable. I'll see to it that these are distributed around the blighted zone as soon as we can get them there. I hope your theory is right. I also hope that the damnable Blight Possessed bastards don't adapt to the effect that your weaponry had on them previously."

The General read his translation and looked back up. "If it keeps your people, and mine, safe then it's the least we could do. Has there been any new development with this AGENCY organization?"

King Farrick took a deep breath before responding. "Sadly, not much. Our people scoured the area that the creature, and your Chief Vickers, led them to. But the Agency knew that something was coming and covered their tracks very well. A few of our mages are working to figure out these door portals they seem fond of. But we've never seen long distance travel like these. Not with the description of how the Chief described them working anyways."

General Krick nodded, that had pretty much matched with what Vickers had reported to them once the drones had gotten his signal back online.

"Well. Let us know if you, or if Captain Choi or Chief Vickers, can think of anything we can send over to help. We'll do what we can. How is the young Captain anyways? He's been offline these past few days."

It was a fib. Vickers had been keeping tabs on the young soldier on their behalf. But the General wanted to know what the King thought of it.

"According to our people in Jadesport he's been having a rough go of it." The King replied honestly. "I understand that it was his first REAL battle, so we've been letting him have his space. But if he doesn't start picking himself up soon then I might need you folks to talk to him. Might need to hear from someone on your side to help him out."

"That's just about what we expected." General Krick replied with a nod. "Young soldier. First battle, like you said. I'll see about getting a specialist on the line with him whenever he's back online. Probably also get his family in touch with him."

"I think that would be best." The King agree.

"How are your people doing sir?" The General asked.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (154/?)

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Writer's note: Vickers makes an attempt at comradery. It's..... successful?

Enjoy.

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Amina stood over the table looking at the information that the various aides had brought her over the past few hours. Supplies that would be needed to repair the walls, using both traditional methods and magical mending to fuse the new material to the old. Food and water for the people who were now without homes and businesses.

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not even mentioning that they might not even get approved by the druidic council.

Then there were the ships. Most of whom had gotten their cargo back on their ships. Though there were a few that were still offloading their passengers. Not all the supplies had been recoverable though. Some had been used in the battle, namely weapons and some magical supplies. Then there was the cargo that had been destroyed as collateral in the battle, either caught in the fires, or else even vanished by the possessed.

Then there were the supplies needed for the wounded. The survivors of the battle hadn't all gotten through unscathed. Many had been injured by the possessed, and were now missing body parts that couldn't be healed by normal means. Others had been injured through more conventional means, misfires by archers, rune stone explosions, spell miscasts, and even just the debris injuries of damaged buildings.

The battle would be a financial burden on the kingdom for years now. And as if that wasn't enough, she also had to address the families of those who had been lost, or at least her father would.

She hadn't slept in days now.

So it came as a surprise when James walked into her command room at the garrison post.

And it pained her that she didn't know whether she was happy to see him or whether she was mad. His state the past few days had been understandable, but she just didn't have time to deal with it at the moment if he was going to cause problems.

Her first sign that he was here was the commotion of her guards challenging him before he entered. They were silenced quickly by her uncle Sigbert's shouting voice telling them who James was.

She'd heard from a few of the soldiers that he'd been holed up in one of the destroyed pubs and half expected him to be drunk. She wouldn't have blamed him. So she was relieved to see that, though scraggly and unkempt, he was actually startlingly sober.

"Hey." He said simply as he leaned on the door frame. He was smiling a little, though she could tell that it was mostly forced.

"Hey." She answered back. "Glad you're back in the land of the living."

James nodded. "Yeah... ummm, just wanted to stop by and see how you're doing and uh... apologize. I know I haven't been terribly... useful... these past few days."

She sagged, as if suddenly aware of her exhaustion, despite having just been thinking about it. Almost as if being asked how she was had suddenly made it sink in.

"I'm tired." She admitted, more to herself than to him. She patted the parchments on the table. "The city is in shambles." She nodded solemnly as she looked at them again. "But I'm okay." She looked back up at him. "How are you?"

He nodded in agreement. "I'm.... probably not too good." He admitted. "But.. gotta move forward, right?" He nodded at the table in front of her. "Anything I can help with? Or is this all princess-general stuff?"

"Sadly...." She began with a deep breath. "This is all princess-general stuff." She forced herself to smile a bit. "Glad to see you though."

James smiled back. "Me too." He replied. "I'm uh... I'm gonna go check on Alixan and Kela. You need anything?" He asked.

She smiled again. "Right now? No. Later though? It'd be nice if a handsome foreigner would join me in bed."

James chuckled. "I'll have to see if I can find one among all the refugees." He joked as he turned to leave.

Amina let out a laugh. "Make sure he's tall and muscular!" She shouted after him.

"Short Jokes?" James asked while doing a walking spin. "Really?"

Amina smiled for real this time. "Give those two my love." She said as he walked out the door and into the street again. He smiled and nodded before walking out of view.

She sighed before turning back to her work. It would be a long time before she was actually able to relax.

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"Is there a reason you're still following me?" James asked as he, for once, got the drop on Vickers.

The chief had, like before at the castle, been shadowing him ever since he'd returned from the tunnel and linked up with them at Jadesport.

James had let it slide for a few days. He'd mostly been sitting on his ass anyways. But now that he was up and moving again, he figured he should ask. So, he'd rounded a corner on his walk to the hospital and then waited for the large SEAL to come around after him.

Vickers just shrugged. "Don't really have many friends here." He said sarcastically.

James just stared at him. Then he rolled his eyes and simply began walking again.

Vickers walked next to him.

"Plus." Vickers continued. "I know what it's like."

"Yeah? Is this the part where you share sage advice? Old warrior to young warrior." James asked.

"Pretty much." Vickers countered, a little annoyed at the snub. "But this aint no 'wax on wax off', "It get's easier', bullshit."

"Really? Cause that's pretty much what I expected."

"Fuck no." Vickers replied. "I aint no sensei or none of that shit." He held his hands up in a mockery of a karate stance as he walked. "Nah. I just know that that was your first battle. Your first REAL battle anyways."

"I've been in battles before." James said a little angrily.

"Noooo." Vickers replied. "You've been in fights." He said sternly. "You shot that wolf chick when you first got here. Yeah I heard about that.The guards here don't know shit about Opsec." He said as James looked at him in shock. "Then there was that duel with the prince, which sounded like some bullshit from a movie. 'I challenge thee to a duel of honor sir!' or some shit."

"I also helped kill a whole clan of-" James tried to say.

"Yeah yeah. That whole clan of handy guys or whatever." Vickers interrupted. "But that wasn't a battle. At least not for you. For you it was just waking up somewhere and having to fight for your life."

"And Amina's." James countered. "And how is that not a battle?"

"Because." Vickers said simply. "It wasn't planned. It was do or die. No other options. That's like getting mugged on your way home and accidentally killing your attacker. It aint murder. It aint a duel, or a battle, or anything like that. It's a shit load of adrenaline and instincts pushing you through limits before you even have a chance to think em through." He shrugged. "It's impressive. Don't get me wrong. I heard some people talk about it and it sounds like you kicked the shit out of those guys. But you weren't in charge. It was just reactionary action."

"It's still a battle." James replied.

"Well. Okay, yes TECHNICALLY it's a battle. Like... by definition." Vickers shrugged again. "But not really." He slapped James's shoulder. "That shit that just happened though." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the wall when James looked at him. "THAT.... that was a battle." He tilted his head a bit as he continued. He also started counting on his fingers. "One; you went into it knowingly. Two; you actually prepped for it. You gathered forces and gear, and you strategized with intel ahead of time. THREE;" He paused as if for effect. He stopped and looked James in the eyes when he stopped too. "You actually led people into it."

Then he started walking again. James didn't really know how to respond to the fact that Vickers was right. That was, the big difference between the two "Battles."

"That's the difference." Vickers continued, as if reading James's mind. "You LED people into combat. And it fuckin SUCKED... big time. I mean... I wasn't here for any of it. Thank god." Vickers said with a mocking sigh. "Because based on what I've heard it sounds like it went fuckin rough up here. Way worse than the shit I got to do down there." He paused again, stopping, James stopped again. "You lost people." He said after a moment. "Including a friend. And as a result you kinda spiraled a bit. Got in the bottle a bit. Even if you only half assed that part."

James was about to say something. Vickers beat him to it.

"And that's good." Vickers said, surprising James.

"What?" He asked in response.

"It's good." Vickers repeated. "It's good that losing like that messed you up. It should." He said. "It's the hardest lesson an officer can ever learn. You aint gonna always win. And even when you do, it aint always gonna be clean. This aint some fairy tale, or video game or something. You saw a threat. You scrambled to defend against it. You won. It cost you a bunch of lives and a friend. And it jacked you up." He poked James in the chest. "But you're up and walking and talking again. I've known more than a few people that shut down after shit like that happened. But they didn't all pick themselves up." He pointed at James again. "The you that's here now. Right here. Aint the specialist that you were last week."

James tried to speak. "I was a ca-"

"No." Vickers interrupted again. "You were still a shitty little specialist." He pointed back at the wall again. "That lesson right there though. That's the difference. You still aint REEEEAAALLY a captain." He said with a bit a snark. "But at least you're startin' to look like one." He nodded a bit. "Gotta squint a bit to see past all the Army bullshit. But the resemblance is there at least. Going forth you gotta keep that lesson in mind. Do that, and maybe next time you won't spiral so hard after."

"So it does get easier?" James asked. "I thought you said this wasn't that speech?"

"It aint." Vickers replied. "Cause FUCK... NO it doesn't get easier. Losing people you like never does. And never should for that matter. If it ever does?" Vickers let out a breath and shook his head a bit. "Turn yourself over to the looney bin kid, cause it means you're fucking done bein' a person anymore."

James didn't really know how to reply to that.

"Other than that though." Vickers shrugged one more time. Then he looked at the wall again. "Not bad." He patted lightly slapped James's shoulder again. "Sorry about your friend."

James considered the man for a moment, then nodded. "Thanks man."

"Now." Vickers said, interrupting the serious moment. "With the wolf chick all crispy, can I get these off?" He pointed at the bands on his ankles. "Or what? We leaving these on?"

James just closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"I am kinda surprised that Prince Douchebag was the one that got you off your ass though." Vickers continued, completely oblivious to how he'd ruined what had, until that moment, been the first really honest moment between the two of them.

James ignored the rest of what the man said and simply continued toward the hospital.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (154/?)

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Then there were the ships. Most of whom had gotten their cargo back on their ships. Though there were a few that were still offloading their passengers. Not all the supplies had been recoverable though. Some had

been used in the battle, namely weapons and some magical supplies. Then there was the cargo that had been destroyed as collateral in the battle, either caught in the fires, or else even vanished by the possessed.

Then there were the supplies needed for the wounded. The survivors of the battle hadn't all gotten through unscathed. Many had been injured by the possessed, and were now missing body parts that couldn't be healed by normal means. Others had been injured through more conventional means, misfires by archers, rune stone explosions, spell miscasts, and even just the debris injuries of damaged buildings.

The battle would be a financial burden on the kingdom for years now. And as if that wasn't enough, she also had to address the families of those who had been lost, or at least her father would.

She hadn't slept in days now.

So it came as a surprise when James walked into her command room at the garrison post.

And it pained her that she didn't know whether she was happy to see him or whether she was mad. His state the past few days had been understandable, but she just didn't have time to deal with it at the moment if he was going to cause problems.

Her first sign that he was there was the commotion of her guards challenging him before he entered. They were silenced quickly by her uncle Sigbert's shouting voice telling them who James was.

She'd heard from a few of the soldiers that he'd been holed up in one of the destroyed pubs and half expected him to be drunk. She wouldn't have blamed him. So she was relieved to see that, though scraggly and unkempt, he was actually startlingly sober.

"Hey." He said simply as he leaned on the door frame. He was smiling a little, though she could tell that it was mostly forced.

"Hey." She answered back. "Glad you're back in the land of the living."

James nodded. "Yeah... ummm, just wanted to stop by and see how you're doing and uh... apologize. I know I haven't been terribly... useful... these past few days."

She sagged, as if suddenly aware of her exhaustion, despite having just been thinking about it. Almost as if being asked how she was had suddenly made it sink in.

"I'm tired." She admitted, more to herself than to him. She patted the parchments on the table. "The city is in shambles." She nodded solemnly as she looked at them again. "But I'm okay." She looked back up at him. "How are you?"

He nodded in agreement. "I'm.... probably not too good." He admitted. "But.. gotta move forward, right?" He nodded at the table in front of her. "Anything I can help with? Or is this all princess-general stuff?"

"Sadly...." She began with a deep breath. "This is all princess-general stuff." She forced herself to smile a bit. "Glad to see you though."

James smiled back. "Me too." He replied. "I'm uh... I'm gonna go check on Alixan and Kela. You need anything?" He asked.

She smiled again. "Right now? No. Later though? It'd be nice if a handsome foreigner would join me in bed."

James chuckled. "I'll have to see if I can find one among all the refugees." He joked as he turned to leave.

Amina let out a laugh. "Make sure he's tall and muscular!" She shouted after him.

"Short Jokes?" James asked while doing a walking spin. "Really?"

Amina smiled for real this time. "Give those two my love." She said as he walked out the door and into the street again. He smiled and nodded before walking out of view.

She sighed before turning back to her work. It would be a long time before she was actually able to relax.

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"Is there a reason you're still following me?" James asked as he, for once, got the drop on Vickers.

The chief had, like before at the castle, been shadowing him ever since he'd returned from the tunnel and linked up with them at Jadesport.

James had let it slide for a few days. He'd mostly been sitting on his ass anyways. But now that he was up and moving again, he figured he should ask. So, he'd rounded a corner on his walk to the hospital and then waited for the large SEAL to come around after him.

Vickers just shrugged. "Don't really have many friends here." He said sarcastically.

James just stared at him. Then he rolled his eyes and simply began walking again.

Vickers walked next to him.

"Plus." Vickers continued. "I know what it's like."

"Yeah? Is this the part where you share sage advice? Old warrior to young warrior." James asked.

"Pretty much." Vickers countered, a little annoyed at the snub. "But this aint no 'wax on wax off', "It get's easier', bullshit."

"Really? Cause that's pretty much what I expected."

"Fuck no." Vickers replied. "I aint no sensei or none of that shit." He held his hands up in a mockery of a karate stance as he walked. "Nah. I just know that that was your first battle. Your first REAL battle anyways."

"I've been in battles before." James said a little angrily.

"Noooo." Vickers replied. "You've been in fights." He said sternly. "You shot that wolf chick when you first got here. Yeah I heard about that.The guards here don't know shit about Opsec." He said as James looked at him in shock. "Then there was that duel with the prince, which sounded like some bullshit from a movie. 'I challenge thee to a duel of honor sir!' or some shit."

"I also helped kill a whole clan of-" James tried to say.

"Yeah yeah. That whole clan of handy guys or whatever." Vickers interrupted. "But that wasn't a battle. At least not for you. For you it was just waking up somewhere and having to fight for your life."

"And Amina's." James countered. "And how is that not a battle?"

"Because." Vickers said simply. "It wasn't planned. It was do or die. No other options. That's like getting mugged on your way home and accidentally killing your attacker. It aint murder. It aint a duel, or a battle, or anything like that. It's a shit load of adrenaline and instincts pushing you through limits before you even have a chance to think em through." He shrugged. "It's impressive. Don't get me wrong. I heard some people talk about it and it sounds like you kicked the shit out of those guys. But you weren't in charge. It was just reactionary action."

"It's still a battle." James replied.

"Well. Okay, yes TECHNICALLY it's a battle. Like... by definition." Vickers shrugged again. "But not really." He slapped James's shoulder. "That shit that just happened though." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the wall when James looked at him. "THAT.... that was a battle." He tilted his head a bit as he continued. He also started counting on his fingers. "One; you went into it knowingly. Two; you actually prepped for it. You gathered forces and gear, and you strategized with intel ahead of time. THREE;" He paused as if for effect. He stopped and looked James in the eyes when he stopped too. "You actually led people into it."

Then he started walking again. James didn't really know how to respond to the fact that Vickers was right. That was, the big difference between the two "Battles."

"That's the difference." Vickers continued, as if reading James's mind. "You LED people into combat. And it fuckin SUCKED... big time. I mean... I wasn't here for any of it. Thank god." Vickers said with a mocking sigh. "Because based on what I've heard it sounds like it went fuckin rough up here. Way worse than the shit I got to do down there." He paused again, stopping, James stopped again. "You lost people." He said after a moment. "Including a friend. And as a result you kinda spiraled a bit. Got in the bottle a bit. Even if you only half assed that part."

James was about to say something. Vickers beat him to it.

"And that's good." Vickers said, surprising James.

"What?" He asked in response.

"It's good." Vickers repeated. "It's good that losing like that messed you up. It should." He said. "It's the hardest lesson an officer can ever learn. You aint gonna always win. And even when you do, it aint always gonna be clean. This aint some fairy tale, or video game or something. You saw a threat. You scrambled to defend against it. You won. It cost you a bunch of lives and a friend. And it jacked you up." He poked James in the chest. "But you're up and walking and talking again. I've known more than a few people that shut down after shit like that happened. But they didn't all pick themselves up." He pointed at James again. "The you that's here now. Right here. Aint the specialist that you were last week."

James tried to speak. "I was a ca-"

"No." Vickers interrupted again. "You were still a shitty little specialist." He pointed back at the wall again. "That lesson right there though. That's the difference. You still aint REEEEAAALLY a captain." He said with a bit a snark. "But at least you're startin' to look like one." He nodded a bit. "Gotta squint a bit to see past all the Army bullshit. But the resemblance is there at least. Going forth you gotta keep that lesson in mind. Do that, and maybe next time you won't spiral so hard after."

"So it does get easier?" James asked. "I thought you said this wasn't that speech?"

"It aint." Vickers replied. "Cause FUCK... NO it doesn't get easier. Losing people you like never does. And never should for that matter. If it ever does?" Vickers let out a breath and shook his head a bit. "Turn yourself over to the looney bin kid, cause it means you're fucking done bein' a person anymore."

James didn't really know how to reply to that.

"Other than that though." Vickers shrugged one more time. Then he looked at the wall again. "Not bad." He lightly slapped James's shoulder again. "Sorry about your friend."

James considered the man for a moment, then nodded. "Thanks man."

"Now." Vickers said, interrupting the serious moment. "With the wolf chick all crispy, can I get these off?" He pointed at the bands on his ankles. "Or what? We leaving these on?"

James just closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"I am kinda surprised that Prince Douchebag was the one that got you off your ass though." Vickers continued, completely oblivious to how he'd ruined what had, until that moment, been the first really honest moment between the two of them.

James ignored the rest of what the man said and simply continued toward the hospital.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (153/?)

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Writer's note: Artair is..... a homie?

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through the hole in the side of the pub. The cafe was remarkably untouched from the chaos.

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"She was a tough old lizard." Artair continued. He winced as he took the first sip of his wine. "And I'm not talking about Maxel either."

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"A fuckin what?" James asked, surprising the prince.

"A drunkard." He answered.

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"Those weren't all mine." James replied. "And if the orc one is the one that tasted like shoe polish and honey than I didn't drink those. I took one sip and then tossed the rest." He shuddered at the memory.

"Well at least you're talking now. And yes, that stuff is disgusting." Artair said as he took another sip. "So is this stuff." He said before grabbing the bottle and looking at it. "Ugh, Estland and only two years old. No fucking wonder."

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"If Amina wants my help she can ask." He said.

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The two of them sat in awkward silence for a moment.

"She died in battle James." Artair said at last. "She'd have probably.... definitely.... preferred to be actively fighting at the time." He said as he swished his drink a bit. "But she'd have understood. This wasn't the first BATTLE she'd been in. Not even close. She knew the risks."

"She shouldn't have been there in the first place." James replied after a moment.

Artair sighed at the obvious self blame he was about to hear.

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James bristled at the mockery.

"Is it wrong?" He asked, clearly agitated.

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James stared at him, mouth agape, at the honesty.

"What?" Artair asked. "It's true."

"You're not very good at this whole, 'pep talk' thing." James said gruffly.

The prince rolled his eyes before pouring himself another glass of the golden wine.

"Want me to coddle you?" He asked. "I can go fetch a midwife to swaddle you if you'd like." He took a drink of the wine. "Or would you like to hear the rest of the truth."

"Yeah? And what's that?" James asked, angry now.

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"It didn't work on your pistol." Artair replied with scorn. He still hated the small weapon for what it had done to his knee. "And according to Amina it didn't work on you ONCE. Who knows what would have happened if you'd been attacked by a mob of those things. Or if they'd ADAPTED like they seemed to do so well during the fight."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (152/?)

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Writer's note: Once again. No note is going to fit here for this.

PS: Holy balls this thing kept glitching while i tried to upload it here. goddam.

\~

James was physically and emotionally numb by the time Amina arrived several hours later.

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Where they were capable of finding both rider and beast they positioned them so that the dragon-kin was wrapped around the rider. As if protecting them while they slept, leaning against their companion.

Gixelle was positioned like that with Maxel, her body wrapped gently in cloth so that her burned flesh wouldn't be disturbed while she was moved. They'd gently removed her sword from her back and had laid it across her legs as if she'd been sharpening or cleaning it.

James looked at the two of them, their peaceful pose reminding him of the countless times he'd seen them take naps like that on the road, or of times when James had rested with Steve in a similar position.

It didn't help James's heart to see Steve lying next to Maxel, nuzzling her as if he was trying to wake her up. James had to pull the drake away from his former mate so that they could prepare her. He gave Steve a chicken that had been splashed with a powerful sleeping potion one of the other riders gave him. Then James tied him to a stake as he nodded off.

The drakes and dragons who were still mobile were used to dig the hole for the fallen clan members. It was their way that the beasts should take part in the process as well. And when the hole in the ground was finally wide enough and deep enough, the fallen were gently moved into it, once more in their resting positions.

It gave the illusion that they'd all dug themselves a massive den, and then simply decided to take a large group nap.

But James couldn't stop looking at Gixelle and Maxel.

Even as he helped the other casters move the earth back in place. He would look at where he knew they were.

Even as they cast spells and used certain magical containers to douse the disturbed ground in a deluge of water. He would look, almost expecting the angry swords-woman to burst out complaining of mud. Like she had when they'd been walking through the half frozen mud to where Steve and Maxel had been prepping for their clutch of eggs.

Even as they used their mounts to then breath fire on the area and bake it into place. He would wonder what he was going to do, what any of the Clan Drakrid members were going to do without her guidance and friendship.

Amina didn't say anything. She simply stood next to him and Steve as the other riders said their words for the ones they knew. Almost all of them having something to say about Gixelle. She had, after all, been the one that absolutely all of them had known.

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One of them. An old half elf with grey hair, how old that made him James had no clue, took Gixelle's flare launcher. It was the one that could summon every rider on the continent. The other riders nodded to him as he took it. When the burial was over he swore to take the device north to the Clan's continental headquarters and to hand it over so that a new Clan leader for the land could be chosen.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (152/?)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (151/?)

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The all encompassing silence of the now barren land outside the city, coupled with the still occasionally flying flares, filled him with a sense of foreboding.

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King Farrick liked the General. At least as much as one world leader could like the other. The man reminded him of Sigbert, albeit in a much more reserved, quiet manner. He was a pragmatist, and he kept things as honest as the King could expect him to.

But.... just like Sigbert, the General was..... well... a General. A warrior, or at least his world's version of a warrior. Choi, and Vickers as well, had both shown him how much their world's people were capable of.

And just like Sigbert, the King knew that the man couldn't be bought or convinced away from his country.

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And he still had his suspicions about how Vickers had gotten into this world.

But he had to set all this aside.

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"Then what's going on? Why are there still flares going off?" She asked.

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"Oh gods." Amina said with a gasp. "Are they alright? How badly did they get hurt?"

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Wait, is this just GATE? (150/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Hey look. Some of the Agency people have names now. Neat.

Enjoy.

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Suddenly Choi's voice filled the room. He coughed for a second before beginning, the cough had a slight rattle to it.

"Hey everyone." He began, sounding exhausted. "Choi here. I'm alive..... Yaaaaay." He took a deep breath, wincing as he did. "So um..... Thanks for uh.... sending those bombs over. They.... seem to have done the trick. I haven't seen any of the Blight Possessed, that's what we're calling them, in quite a while. Did kinda get knocked out by the explosion for a while though. Think you guys might've just given this world its first taste of overkill. Not that I'm complaining. That shit was clutch."

Choi can be heard struggling with something on his side, winces and grunts making it obvious that he's in pain.

"Uuugh. I got.... whoo, a little banged up in the battle. And I am very.....VERY... burned as a result of the bombs." He said. There was a deep rumble followed by a slight hiss that the General thought might have been Choi's lizard monster. "But luckily ole Steve here..... And the crown prince.... both managed to save me from getting turned into a bunch of ashes. But that does bring me to a bit of a problem."

The General raised his eyebrow at that. He was honestly amazed to hear Choi speaking. The young captain's last location, as well as footage from a drone that had been remotely re-positioned, had convinced him that the young man was likely dead. His survival was nothing short of a miracle.

"The prince..." Choi continued. "He managed to get to me in time to put up some uh... magical protection. But... well, he got hurt pretty bad. First and second degree burns on his head and face, plus some other places where he wasn't armored. " Choi paused. "Second.... and I think third degree burns on his hands. As well as severe magical overuse..... um I don't know... Varicose veins? Thrombosis? Whatever you want to call it. If you overuse your magical abilities it fucks your veins up." He took a deep breath. "I've done what I can to bandage him up. He's breathing. I've got him secured and am gonna continue to the City." He grunts in pain again. "But just so y'all know. I am alive. Now I just have to figure out who else is. This message will get to ya whenever it gets to ya. Choi out."

You could practically feel the relief flood the room as everyone heard the end of the message. Even Colonel Muhammed had been listening intently and now had a small smile on her face.

"Okay folks." The General said, breaking up the muted celebration. "Let's let the King know what's going on. Someone send some burn cream through for Choi for whenever he gets back to the capital."

Then they went back to work. But the General let out a sigh of relief.

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There was the chance that there were still some possessed lingering about or hiding.

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And of course there were the civilians out in the evacuation ships, that would need to be brought back in, resettled, and for a lot of them re-homed as well. Not to mention all the supplies that would need to be put back on the ship, or else compensated by the crown.

The battle had been won. But both of them knew that it had been at an extreme cost to the kingdom.

Plus there was Axilan.

The second the few healers in the group had seen his condition they had gone to work, forgoing their opportunity to rest in favor of saving the crown prince.

They were both certain that he would survive. But neither of them was able to say how well his hands would recover. They were even less certain about how well he would recover magically. Neither had ever seen a case of magical overuse this extensive.

Even Veliry was aghast when she saw him, after flying down from the wall to see how they were doing. Her hands and legs were also criss-crossed by the black veins. She attributed them to the battle, and admitted that only her tattoos were allowing her to fly at the moment.

James held his good arm around Amina's shoulders as she watched the healers work, draping the blanket he'd been given around both of them. One of the other warriors in the group had helped wrap his shoulder, after painfully setting it for him, in the glowing green healing bandages. He hadn't even realized that, on top of being broken in a few places, it had become dislocated. Having the joint set only eased the pain though, it didn't eliminate it.

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Then they heard a loud shrieking noise from the sky. James's leg tattoo pulsed and seemed to pull at him. He looked back and saw a flare in the sky, just like the one he'd launched only days ago.

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"Nothing good." The one eyed orc said to him before whistling for his drake to come over.

A dragon took to the air a few blocks away. It looked around as other flying clan members also rose up. They all signaled to each other then split up. One of them flew towards where James and the orc were. It landed on a house next to them.

"You two able to respond?" The rider asked them.

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The orc grunted. "Aye." He said simply.

James looked back at Amina who was clearly anxious to follow her brother. She looked back at him.

"Go." She said with a nod. "You have a duty to the clan. I'll be here when you get back."

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"More so than even I had ever guessed." Said another, smaller, figure as they inspected the black stained crater on the ground next to the, now non-functional, door. "What was that thing he gave her?"

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Writer's note: Things get better. Then worse. Then better. Then.... questionably better(?)

Who Am I kidding? Even our characters don't know what's going on around them.

Combat is confusing as fuck on all sides.

Enjoy.

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Amina raced through the city.

For the most part her defensive forces had been shattered.

There were still holdouts however.

A cluster of mages and a few Ballistiers had taken refuge in one of the wall towers, blasting any possessed that got too close and using stone magic to keep the tower from being toppled.

The Griffin talon overhead had finally managed to clear out the few flying possessed and had retaken air superiority, albeit only barely, and were bombarding any possessed they could find. Unfortunately the city buildings were limiting their effectiveness.

A large group of soldiers had had a few of the mages make them a moat around a large building. The mages had been lucky enough to intersect the moat with one of the city's sewage aqueducts, and as a result the moat was filled with stinking water that was at least buying them time to defend themselves.

On the upside, Veliry still reported that no more Possessed were coming to the city from outside. Whatever those bombs, or missiles as the General had called them, had done they'd at least cleared out the blight lands of any reinforcements. In fact, Veliry had told her that she didn't think the blightlands could even be called a land any more. All she saw beyond the wall was a smoking wasteland with what she assumed was no living creature in it any more.

That news had terrified Amina even as it had relieved her. No reinforcements for the enemy was great. But the destruction that had just befallen her country in a matter of minutes was disturbing. And it had been done remotely from an entirely different world.

But, those were problems for another day.

The wall of the city, once one of the crowning achievements of their country, now looked like a sieve, or else a piece of white and green wood that had suffered a termite infestation. The buildings inside of it, for nearly half a mile, were in varying states of disarray. Some had been collapsed by the vanishing powers of the possessed. Some had been burned by the various spells, bombs, and rune stones that the defenders had used. And some had been crushed by falling griffins and dragon-kin, or else by the collapsing buildings next to them. Some were still on fire.

Amina estimated that nearly a third of Jadesport had been destroyed, and was still being destroyed, by the battle.

Her only consolation was that during one of her rooftop ventures she'd seen the last of the ships pulling out of the city and into the sea.

Barring any lingerers or anyone who hadn't fit aboard the ships, they'd successfully evacuated the city to the best of their abilities.

She didn't know what had happened with the main force of the Clan Drakrid riders.

She didn't know what had happened with that damnable Chief Vickers or Artair's assault into the deep dark, and ideally the Agency itself.

Worst of all, she hadn't heard any news of James, or of Alixan's attempt to get to him before the explosions did.

But she would worry about that later. For now, she had a fight to finish.

Her first shot with the pistol James had given her had gone wide of that first monster duo. She'd shot from the hip, as James had called it, while falling through a collapsing building. Her magically enhanced

reflexes had allowed her to see the bullet impact the wall next to the horse and rider just as she'd begun squeezing the trigger for the second shot.

She'd fired a few REAL bullets before during James's lessons. But the recoil had still thrown her off.

But her second, third, and fourth shots had all been, more or less, on the mark. The second shot had struck the rider just under his sternum, punching through his leather armor and knocking him off of the possessed horse. The third had gone wild once more, but had still grazed the horse's face and rear before continuing on. The fourth had struck it in the cheek as it had jerked to the side to look at the new injury, and as a result had blown the other side of the creature's face open.

Both of them had dropped to the ground dead only a moment after Amina had regained her footing.

She'd smiled at the fact that James had been right about the weapons working on the possessed.

Four shots for two of them. She'd thought. *Not bad. But I can do better.*

Then she'd bolted out of the still collapsing building, holding her shield over her head as she ran to protect herself from the falling debris.

Then she'd begun racing through the city, blasting the possessed with magic when she could blind side them. And shooting them with the pistol when she had to face them head on. She only had three spare mags. But that was still a total of fifty six possessed she could potentially kill.

She also let Veliry know that the Earth based materials were effective against them. She had a sneaking suspicion that the diminutive mage had some of the materials that had been sent over in one of her bottomless bags. She'd been happy to hear Veliry confirm the suspicion, and Amina had told her to figure out how to make them work for her. Though she did warn against using any firearms without any training.

Ultimately, she just had to hope that it would be enough.

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James woke up when something hit rough rubbed against the back of his legs, causing a flare of pain to shoot through them.

At first he didn't recognize where he was. All he saw was darkness and something furry.

Then something bumped into his right arm and he looked over. He was surprised to see Alixan next to him.

"What the fuck?" He asked, and the motion around them suddenly stopped.

Then he was dropped roughly onto the ground.

He cried out in pain as his back impacted. He tried to move, but every inch of his body felt as though it had been severely sunburned. Then he remembered what had happened, and he realized that that probably wasn't far off from the truth.

How the hell was he alive.

As if to answer, Steve licked his entire face with his forked tongue.

James reached up to fend him off and pain shot through his left shoulder, he'd momentarily forgotten that it was some kind of broken. Steve whimpered from the shared pain, but didn't relent in his affection.

"Hey.... hey boy." James said weakly. "Oh.... oh thank god we're alive."

Then he looked around and realized how truly impossible that should have been.

His mind flashed back to L.A.

To the memories of the missiles striking the cities near his aunt and uncle's home, as they'd watched from the windows. To the footage of D.C. after it had been hit by several nuclear bombs, instantly erasing so much of America's history.

He knew what wastelands looked like.

And he was in one.

James looked about for a moment, soaking in the sight of the barren, ash coated, flat land around him.

Then he scrambled up, ignoring the pain in his body as he rummaged through the scorched saddle bags on Steve's sides. He didn't even realize how dangerous the damaged bags were. He just knew that he had to find his dog tags.

It took a few minutes, they were tangled up with a set of headphones that he'd had when he'd been brought over, but he found them. He pulled them out and then did what he'd been trained to do, swinging them around in a wide circle like he was trying to lasso or whip something. After five rotations he brought them down and rubbed them in some of the ashes that were there. He held them down for thirty seconds and then picked them back up and looked at them anxiously.

They were still just silver metal. He thanked god, the Army, and General Krick that they hadn't gone full send and used nuclear weapons. If the tags had come up and been colored red, he'd have been a dead man walking. Hell, Alixan and probably Steve would have been too.

He slumped down against Steve's leg and breathed a very painful sigh of relief. Steve just looked at him curiously.

"We're good boy." He said after catching his breath. "Just thought we might have been glow in the dark for a minute there. But we're good."

Then he looked at Alixan and his heart dropped.

James rushed over to the fallen prince and gently touched his fingers to his throat, while also grabbing his wrist in his other hand.

Alixan had been burned even worse than James was. His once long blonde hair was singed down to his scalp. His armor was scorched around the edges, and the feathers that had once lined the edges of his shoulders were gone.

His hands, especially the palms, were scorched with what James knew were at least second degree burns, if not third.

Every inch of skin that James could see also looked like a topographical map of the prince's veins, all of which were black. James recognized the damage from when he'd defeated the elemental months before. Magical overuse.

But, James realized, the prince had a pulse.

He got hurt like that to save me. James realized as he rushed back to the saddlebags to pull out the remaining bandages he had. He also pulled out a blanket that was part of his camp gear.

Then he went to work.

He removed Alixan's armor, then used his knife to cut off the shirt underneath. Luckily the prince wasn't burned almost at all underneath, his armor having taken the brunt of the heat for him, and he didn't seem to have any broken bones despite the impact of his arrival, so James put them back on.

His hands were as bad as James had thought. He could barely examine them without skin attempting to slide off. He cast his healing spell, weak as it was when he used it, to try to undo the damage he'd accidentally caused, and saw some success. Then he very gently wrapped each hand up to the forearm with the glowing green bandages. Once that was done he used a length of paracord from his bag to secure Alixan's arms, tying the ends of his bracers together at one of their clip points so that his arms wouldn't flop around while he was moved.

He didn't bother assessing Alixan's head. The burns were all over it, but they weren't even close to the ones on his hands. James guessed that he probably looked just about as badly burned too. But he wasn't bleeding, and James didn't see any obvious injuries, so he simply wrapped it up.

Once he was done with that he gently lifted him up and laid him on the blanket, which he then wrapped around the injured prince and secured in place with more paracord. A few minutes of struggling with the nearly eight foot tall prince's unconscious form, and he managed to get him up on Steve's back, using the ends of the blanket and some more cord to fashion a sort of hammock on the drake's right side.

After that James took five minutes, happy to notice that none of the possessed showed up to cause any problems, and ate and drank some of the food and water from one of his bags. He gave Steve two of the chicken carcasses that he'd brought with him, which the drake ate greedily.

"Guess you guys really are fireproof huh boy?" He asked as he leaned against the side of the drake. "Glad you still got your lungs in the right spot too. Don't know how though." He sighed. "Questions for later I guess."

Steve licked his face again.

He'd put on his uniform jacket to keep the cold at bay, and had his left arm inside of it and holding onto the buttons from the inside as a makeshift sling. The effort of lifting Alixan up and into place had made it hurt more than ever. He had a feeling that it would never be quite the same again, and hoped that he was wrong.

Once he'd caught his breath he slowly, and gingerly, climbed up onto the drake's back.

Then he turned Steve toward the nearby city, battered as it now looked, and kicked him into a slow trot. As he rode, he reached down into one of the bags and pulled out one of the last few drones and the drone control tablet. He recorded a quick message for back home, then set the drone to fly towards the capital and send the message as soon as it found signal.

"Boy." He said to Steve as they rode. "We need a fucking vacation from all this bullshit."

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It was nearly two hours before James got to the city. He had to go slow, partly to keep from jostling his injured body, but also so that he could check the prince's pulse every few minutes. Plus, even with the near complete visibility of the now empty area, he was still wary of the possessed.

The perimeter of it was littered with corpses. Most of them were the blight possessed, skewered by arrows and ballista shots from the top of the wall, or else blasted by explosions and spells. But there were some, closer to the wall, that he suspected were victims of being partially vanished by the beasts. Some were members of the griffin talon that had been flying overhead, who he now noticed were no longer in the sky. Some, including a dwarf he remembered healing him after he'd broken Steve, were Clan Drakrid members, who had been defending the wall with their drake's fire breath.

The dwarf had been vanished damn near in half, his body ending just below his shoulders. His drake, a strikingly vibrant mixture of pink with green splotches that reminded him of Maxel was missing a part of its back. James looked at them somberly. For the life of him, he couldn't remember the dwarf's name. That fact made James feel even more awful than he already did.

James tried his throat mic, but it didn't work. He pulled it off and noticed that most of it was melted. Not all the way, but enough to keep it from functioning.

He rode Steve through one of the holes in the wall, disturbed at how quiet everything was.

The carnage on the other side of the wall wasn't much better.

The first thing he saw upon entering was a massive grey wyrm body that was riddled with spears and arrows. One of its arms had been blasted off by an explosion and it had crashed into, and as a result destroyed what appeared to be a pub. It was surrounded by city guards who hadn't been fortunate enough to escape its crash. Several of whom were also partially vanished. James had a feeling that the wyrm had been possessed, but there was no way to know now.

Steve sniffed at the bodies he passed over, often turning his nose up at the ones that James suspected were formerly blight possessed. The ashes falling from the sky like snow, and the cold wind, made everything even more haunting than the oppressive silence.

He rode through the remnants and wreckage of the once beautiful city for another twenty minutes before he happened across anyone. When he did they nearly killed him.

"THERE'S ANOTHER ONE!" One of the people in the building had shouted as he and Steve had rounded the corner. He had to pull Steve's reins back and get the lizard to back up as a series of arrows and rune stones impacted the street they'd just been on.

"WOAH!" He yelled as he hopped off of Steve's back. "WE'RE NOT BLIGHT POSSESSED!"

"OY!" One of the people shouted. "You lot hear that? It's a person! Everyone hold fire!"

James stuck his arm out past the building and waved it. "Don't shoot!" He yelled. He waited a few seconds, then he peered around the corner.

There was a two story building that had a ring of nasty brown liquid around it. It had a sign that told James that it was a bakery. Soldiers, and a few mages, were looking at him from every window, and several were stationed on the rooftop.

"Prove you're a person!" One of the ones on the roof instructed him.

James shot a blast of fire out of his hands before holding em up.

"I actually don't know if that's proof!" He admitted. "Can those things use magic?" He asked them.

The rag tag group conversed for a second before the same one spoke up again.

"Don't think so." He said as he clambered up and sat on the central ridge of the roof, crossbow resting on his lap. "Can't put it past em, but... aint none of us seen em do it."

James relaxed and gestured Steve over.

"Where is everyone?" James asked. His voice caught a bit before he asked the next question. "Are you guys all that's left?"

A mage popped their head out of one of the second story windows.

"We're not the only survivors." The mage said. James's heart dropped a little at the word SURVIVORS. Then the mage continued. "We're just the ones closest to the wall on this side. There's a few, including the Arch Mage, who are on top of the wall. And there are a few other pockets here or there. Last we saw the General was leading some of the griffin riders to attack some of the bastards with that loud magic weapon of hers. That was about an hour ago, somewhere to the south." He said while pointing in the direction.

"General?" James wondered. "You mean the princess?" He asked.

"Aye." One of the other soldiers answered. "Had some loud device that she said killed the beasties. Seemed to work too. She used it on that one there." He said, pointing at a large orc that was lying dead nearby.

James went over and inspected the body. There were two small holes just below its left breast, and another on its shoulder. He recognized bullet holes when he saw them.

"Dropped it faster than anything else we'd seen." The soldier added as James stood up. "Hurt my bloody ears though."

"Stay here." He said. "I'm gonna go find her."

"Careful lad." The mage said as he climbed up Steve's side. "Aint heard that weapon of hers make noise in a while now. Don't know what happened."

James just nodded as he rode down one of the streets toward where he'd been pointed.

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Amina spit a bit of blood out as she sat down in one of the chairs of the small cafe. One of the griffin riders stumbled as he dismounted his griffin. The beast promptly fell down, splayed out and breathing heavily as the rider rolled over onto his back. The Ballistier that had joined them made the sign of Pantatros before setting his weapon down and unclipping his chest plate.

Around them the other members of their small band were slowly falling down into various places and seats so that they could rest too. An old, grey haired, dwarf placed is helmet on the ground behind him, and leaned so that the back plate of his armor rested against it, letting him lean back as if in a bed. he was snoring within seconds.

She looked down at the battered pistol in her hand as she dropped her enchanted shield next to her. The incredible, deadly, unassuming piece of metal and springs, that James had given her before she'd split off to lead the defense of the city, was broken. She had no idea if it could be repaired or not.

It had run out of rounds hours ago. Since then she'd been using it as a cudgel, in a technique that James had described as "pistol whipping". She'd even thrown it at one of the possessed once, when it had been on the verge of vanishing the now snoring dwarf. It had impacted the side of the former mage's head and knocked them to the ground, dazed. She'd used the distraction to blast it with a fire bolt.

Now its slide was stuck back in its open position, the guide rod underneath bent at almost a forty five degree angle. The magazine had had its bottom plate smashed off during one of her strikes and the spring inside was sticking out. The trigger guard was bent enough that she almost couldn't get her finger in it.

She hoped that James wouldn't be upset. It had been his Sergeant's weapon before he'd died, and she knew that it had sentimental value to him.

But it had also saved her life, and killed so many of the Blight Possessed. Angry at its destruction or not, she had a feeling that he would be glad she'd used it so well.

"Was that the last of them?" A young militia member asked. She couldn't have been older than seventeen, her left eye was sealed shut with dried blood from her brow.

Amina didn't answer. She just kept trying to breath. She hadn't been in a battle this exhausting since she'd been a fresh recruit years before.

"If there's any more." An old elvish mage from Alixan's talon said. "Then they're either hiding. Or gone somewhere else."

He and the one other member of the Raven's Shadow with them had made a visual sweep of the city after the last skirmish they'd just been through.

Amina touched the button to activate her throat mic.

"Veliry." She started. "What's the word? Are there any more?" She asked.

She waited several moments. She was about to try again, fearing that maybe the mage had fallen, when Veliry answered.

"We're not seeing much from up here." Veliry answered, exhaustion clear in her voice. "We don't see any movement outside of the wall save for some carrion birds. But it's getting hard to see with all this ash. We're going to have to ask James what those were if we find him." She said.

If? Amina wondered. *Even Veliry is using "If"?* The thought didn't help her exhaustion.

"And what about inside the walls?" She asked.

Another pause.

"Lots of fires." Veliry replied finally. "Jadesport is gonna lose some more buildings before we get all this finished." She paused. "There is something interesting moving toward your position though."

Amina tensed, her hand gripping the wrecked pistol tighter as she leaned forward and picked up her shield again.

"What direction?" She asked as she got to her feet. Her legs were shaking. She signaled to the others that something was wrong.

"From the north." Veliry answered.

Almost as if on cue, one of the corpses of the possessed, a now dead centaur, moved. Where before the remaining fighters had been slowly getting up again, now they all shot to their feet, weapons ready for another fight. Even Amina felt steadier now that something was coming.

She expected the centaur to stand back up and reveal that all their work had been for nothing.

Then a large and, for her at least, familiar snout appeared and pushed the dead body out of its way.

"Steve?" She asked, dropping the pistol to the ground in surprise.

The drake heard her and perked up, looking right at her. His eyes were both synchronized. They didn't peer in multiple, random, directions like the blight spawned.

Steve emerged from the narrow street. Then she saw who was riding him. Who was still CAPABLE of riding him.

Amina felt her legs become unsteady again even as a smile broke out on her face.

James looked at her with the lopsided grin she'd come to love. His left eye was deep red from a ruptured blood vessel, and his skin was bright red. He was using his uniform as a sling to hold his left arm. He pulled his leg over Steve's back and dropped out of sight for a moment before reappearing in front of him again.

"Hey." He said, as casually as if he'd just run into her in the hall. Something about the relaxed tone made her feel immensely more at ease.

"Is it really you?" She asked, not sure if any of this was even real any more.

"I fuckin' hope not." He said sarcastically. "I'm really hoping that any minute now you wake me up with a plate of salted smeplies and this all ends up being some shitty nightmare."

She rushed forward and wrapped her arms around him.

"Ow. Watch the shoulder." He said, as she kissed him just below his ear. "Hon. We both look like shit."

She laughed. "You look significantly worse than I do." She countered. "Alixan made it to you in time?"

"Oh shit." He said as he broke the embrace. He rushed to the large bundle that she hadn't even noticed on Steve's side. It was a very large bundle.

The sight of it suddenly filled her with dread.

"I NEED A HEALER!" James yelled as he began gently lowering the bundle.

No, she realized, it wasn't a bundle. It was a person.

And as James opened it up all the way and reached in to check something. She realized who that person was.

"Xan?" She gasped as she saw the black veins on his skin. "No."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/uskjjo/wait_is_this_just_gate_150/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (149/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ur3qs5/wait_is_this_just_gate_148/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Things get better. Then worse. Then better. Then.... questionably better(?)

Who Am I kidding? Even our characters don't know what's going on around them.

Combat is confusing as fuck on all sides.

Enjoy.

\~

Amina raced through the city.

For the most part her defensive forces had been shattered.

There were still holdouts however.

A cluster of mages and a few Ballistiers had taken refuge in one of the wall towers, blasting any possessed that got too close and using stone magic to keep the tower from being toppled.

The Griffin talon overhead had finally managed to clear out the few flying possessed and had retaken air superiority, albeit only barely, and were bombarding any possessed they could find. Unfortunately the city buildings were limiting their effectiveness.

A large group of soldiers had had a few of the mages make them a moat around a large building. The mages had been lucky enough to intersect the moat with one of the city's sewage aqueducts, and as a result the moat was filled with stinking water that was at least buying them time to defend themselves.

On the upside, Veliry still reported that no more Possessed were coming to the city from outside. Whatever those bombs, or missiles as the General had called them, had done they'd at least cleared out the blight lands of any reinforcements. In fact, Veliry had told her that she didn't think the blightlands could even be called a land any more. All she saw beyond the wall was a smoking wasteland with what she assumed was no living creature in it any more.

That news had terrified Amina even as it had relieved her. No reinforcements for the enemy was great. But the destruction that had just befallen her country in a matter of minutes was disturbing. And it had been done remotely from an entirely different world.

But, those were problems for another day.

The wall of the city, once one of the crowning achievements of their country, now looked like a sieve, or else a piece of white and green wood that had suffered a termite infestation. The buildings inside of it, for nearly half a mile, were in varying states of disarray. Some had been collapsed by the vanishing powers of the possessed. Some had been burned by the various spells, bombs, and rune stones that the defenders had used. And some had been crushed by falling griffins and dragon-kin, or else by the collapsing buildings next to them. Some were still on fire.

Amina estimated that nearly a third of Jadesport had been destroyed, and was still being destroyed, by the battle.

Her only consolation was that during one of her rooftop ventures she'd seen the last of the ships pulling out of the city and into the sea.

Barring any lingerers or anyone who hadn't fit aboard the ships, they'd successfully evacuated the city to the best of their abilities.

She didn't know what had happened with the main force of the Clan Drakrid riders.

She didn't know what had happened with that damnable Chief Vickers or Artair's assault into the deep dark, and ideally the Agency itself.

Worst of all, she hadn't heard any news of James, or of Alixan's attempt to get to him before the explosions did.

But she would worry about that later. For now, she had a fight to finish.

Her first shot with the pistol James had given her had gone wide of that first monster duo. She'd shot from the hip, as James had called it, while falling through a collapsing building. Her magically enhanced reflexes had allowed her to see the bullet impact the wall next to the horse and rider just as she'd begun squeezing the trigger for the second shot.

She'd fired a few REAL bullets before during James's lessons. But the recoil had still thrown her off.

But her second, third, and fourth shots had all been, more or less, on the mark. The second shot had struck the rider just under his sternum, punching through his leather armor and knocking him off of the possessed horse. The third had gone wild once more, but had still grazed the horse's face and rear before continuing on. The fourth had struck it in the cheek as it had jerked to the side to look at the new injury, and as a result had blown the other side of the creature's face open.

Both of them had dropped to the ground dead only a moment after Amina had regained her footing.

She'd smiled at the fact that James had been right about the weapons working on the possessed.

Four shots for two of them. She'd thought. *Not bad. But I can do better.*

Then she'd bolted out of the still collapsing building, holding her shield over her head as she ran to protect herself from the falling debris.

After that she'd begun racing through the city, blasting the possessed with magic when she could blind side them. And shooting them with the pistol when she had to face them head on. She only had three spare mags.

But that was still a total of fifty six possessed she could potentially kill.

She also let Veliry know that the Earth based materials were effective against them. She had a sneaking suspicion that the diminutive mage had some of the materials that had been sent over in one of her bottomless bags. She'd been happy to hear Veliry confirm the suspicion, and Amina had told her to figure out how to make them work for her. Though she did warn against using any firearms without any training.

Ultimately, she just had to hope that it would be enough.

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James woke up when something had roughly rubbed against the back of his legs, causing a flare of pain to shoot through them.

At first he didn't recognize where he was. All he saw was darkness and something furry.

Then something bumped into his right arm and he looked over. He was surprised to see Alixan next to him.

"What the fuck?" He asked, and the motion around them suddenly stopped.

Then he was dropped roughly onto the ground.

He cried out in pain as his back impacted. He tried to move, but every inch of his body felt as though it had been severely sunburned. Then he remembered what had happened, and he realized that that probably wasn't far off from the truth.

How the hell was he alive.

As if to answer, Steve licked his entire face with his forked tongue.

James reached up to fend him off and pain shot through his left shoulder, he'd momentarily forgotten that it was some kind of broken. Steve whimpered from the shared pain, but didn't relent in his affection.

"Hey.... hey boy." James said weakly. "Oh.... oh thank god we're alive."

Then he looked around and realized how truly impossible that should have been.

His mind flashed back to L.A.

To the memories of the missiles striking the cities near his aunt and uncle's home, as they'd watched from the windows. To the footage of D.C. after it had been hit by several nuclear bombs, instantly erasing so much of America's history.

He knew what wastelands looked like.

And he was in one.

James looked about for a moment, soaking in the sight of the barren, ash coated, flat land around him.

Then he scrambled up, ignoring the pain in his body as he rummaged through the scorched saddle bags on Steve's sides. He didn't even realize how dangerous the damaged bags were. He just knew that he had to find his dog tags.

It took a few minutes, they were tangled up with a set of headphones that he'd had when he'd been brought over, but he found them. He pulled them out and then did what he'd been trained to do, swinging them around in a wide circle like he was trying to lasso or whip something. After five rotations he brought them down and rubbed them in some of the ashes that were there. He held them down for thirty seconds and then picked them back up and looked at them anxiously.

They were still just silver metal. He thanked god, the Army, and General Krick that they hadn't gone full send and used nuclear weapons. If the tags had come up and been colored red, he'd have been a dead man walking. Hell, Alixan and probably Steve would have been too.

He slumped down against Steve's leg and breathed a very painful sigh of relief. Steve just looked at him curiously.

"We're good boy." He said after catching his breath. "Just thought we might have been glow in the dark for a minute there. But we're good."

Then he looked at Alixan and his heart dropped.

James rushed over to the fallen prince and gently touched his fingers to his throat, while also grabbing his wrist in his other hand.

Alixan had been burned even worse than James was. His once long blonde hair was singed down to his scalp. His armor was scorched around the edges, and the feathers that had once lined the edges of his shoulders were gone.

His hands, especially the palms, were scorched with what James knew were at least second degree burns, if not third.

Every inch of skin that James could see also looked like a topographical map of the prince's veins, all of which were black. James recognized the damage from when he'd defeated the elemental months before. Magical overuse.

But, James realized, the prince had a pulse.

He got hurt like that to save me. James realized as he rushed back to the saddlebags to pull out the remaining bandages he had. He also pulled out a blanket that was part of his camp gear.

Then he went to work.

He removed Alixan's armor, then used his knife to cut off the shirt underneath. Luckily the prince wasn't burned almost at all underneath, his armor having taken the brunt of the heat for him, and he didn't seem to have any broken bones despite the impact of his arrival, so James put them back on.

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She looked down at the battered pistol in her hand as she dropped her enchanted shield next to her. The incredible, deadly, unassuming piece of metal and springs, that James had given her before she'd split off to lead the defense of the city, was broken. She had no idea if it could be repaired or not.

It had run out of rounds hours ago. Since then she'd been using it as a cudgel, in a technique that James had described as "pistol whipping". She'd even thrown it at one of the possessed once, when it had been on the verge of vanishing the now snoring dwarf. It had impacted the side of the former mage's head and knocked them to the ground, dazed. She'd used the distraction to blast it with a fire bolt.

Now its slide was stuck back in its open position, the guide rod underneath bent at almost a forty five degree angle. The magazine had had its bottom plate smashed off during one of her strikes and the spring inside was sticking out. The trigger guard was bent enough that she almost couldn't get her finger in it.

She hoped that James wouldn't be upset. It had been his Sergeant's weapon before he'd died, and she knew that it had sentimental value to him.

But it had also saved her life, and killed so many of the Blight Possessed. Angry at its destruction or not, she had a feeling that he would be glad she'd used it so well.

"Was that the last of them?" A young militia member asked. She couldn't have been older than seventeen, her left eye was sealed shut with dried blood from her brow.

Amina didn't answer. She just kept trying to breath. She hadn't been in a battle this exhausting since she'd been a fresh recruit years before.

"If there's any more." An old elvish mage from Alixan's talon said. "Then they're either hiding. Or gone somewhere else."

He and the one other member of the Raven's Shadow with them had made a visual sweep of the city after the last skirmish they'd just been through.

Amina touched the button to activate her throat mic.

"Veliry." She started. "What's the word? Are there any more?" She asked.

She waited several moments. She was about to try again, fearing that maybe the mage had fallen, when Veliry answered.

"We're not seeing much from up here." Veliry answered, exhaustion clear in her voice. "We don't see any movement outside of the wall save for some carrion birds. But it's getting hard to see with all this ash. We're going to have to ask James what those were if we find him." She said.

If? Amina wondered. *Even Veliry is using "If"?* The thought didn't help her exhaustion.

"And what about inside the walls?" She asked.

Another pause.

"Lots of fires." Veliry replied finally. "Jadesport is gonna lose some more buildings before we get all this finished." She paused. "There is something interesting moving toward your position though."

Amina tensed, her hand gripping the wrecked pistol tighter as she leaned forward and picked up her shield again.

"What direction?" She asked as she got to her feet. Her legs were shaking. She signaled to the others that something was wrong.

"From the north." Veliry answered.

Almost as if on cue, one of the corpses of the possessed, a now dead centaur, moved. Where before the remaining fighters had been slowly

getting up again, now they all shot to their feet, weapons ready for another fight. Even Amina felt steadier now that something was coming.

She expected the centaur to stand back up and reveal that all their work had been for nothing.

Then a large and, for her at least, familiar snout appeared and pushed the dead body out of its way.

"Steve?" She asked, dropping the pistol to the ground in surprise.

The drake heard her and perked up, looking right at her. His eyes were both synchronized. They didn't peer in multiple, random, directions like the blight spawned.

Steve emerged from the narrow street. Then she saw who was riding him. Who was still CAPABLE of riding him.

Amina felt her legs become unsteady again even as a smile broke out on her face.

James looked at her with the lopsided grin she'd come to love. His left eye was deep red from a ruptured blood vessel, and his skin was bright red. He was using his uniform as a sling to hold his left arm. He pulled his leg over Steve's back and dropped out of sight for a moment before reappearing in front of him again.

"Hey." He said, as casually as if he'd just run into her in the hall. Something about the relaxed tone made her feel immensely more at ease.

"Is it really you?" She asked, not sure if any of this was even real any more.

"I fuckin' hope not." He said sarcastically. "I'm really hoping that any minute now you wake me up with a plate of salted smeplies and this all ends up being some shitty nightmare."

She rushed forward and wrapped her arms around him.

"Ow. Watch the shoulder." He said, as she kissed him just below his ear. "Hon. We both look like shit."

She laughed. "You look significantly worse than I do." She countered. "Alixan made it to you in time?"

"Oh shit." He said as he broke the embrace. He rushed to the large bundle that she hadn't even noticed on Steve's side. It was a very large bundle.

The sight of it suddenly filled her with dread.

"I NEED A HEALER!" James yelled as he began gently lowering the bundle.

No, she realized, it wasn't a bundle. It was a person.

And as James opened it up all the way and reached in to check something. She realized who that person was.

"Xan?" She gasped as she saw the black veins on his skin. "No."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/uskiqq/wait_is_this_just_gate_150/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (148/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/up02l6/wait_is_this_just_gate_147/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Screw chekov's gun. I prefer slightly more interesting deus ex machinas.

Enjoy :-)

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"What?" James asked. "What are you doin-"

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As she turned her griffin back she looked at the harbor lane. The last two ships were nearly at the halfway point of the channel, and were now switching over to taking on the last of the passengers.

"THE SHIPS ARE NEARLY FREE! HOLD THE WALL!" She shouted as loud as she could. "LET NONE THROUGH THE DEFENCES! DEFEND OUR PEOPLE! DEFEND YOUR FAMILIES!"

Then she plummeted back down for another attack sweep.

But not before she saw the closest of the missile strikes land only a few miles outside of the wall.

Her eyes widened as she saw the fireball bloom. The light of it leaving a spot on her vision before she felt her griffin begin struggle to maintain its dive.

She wanted to call out a warning. But then she was back in the fight.

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"Jeeeezus." Vickers said as he and the Agency member sat and looked at each other. The tremor had dislodged a bit of dirt from the ceiling. The young, he assumed fairy, woman looked up curiously. *They must be using the big stuff out there.* He thought.

"Your people responsible for that?" The woman asked him.

He shrugged. "I hope so." He said simply.

"So." She continued. "Why have you asked me to come here?"

He shrugged once more. "Honestly just wanted to get eyes on the people that had tried to kill the princess, and the young Captain Choi." He said. "Plus. Your... 'Agency'.... bears an uncanny resemblance to a few of the boogeymen from our world."

"Really?" She asked with a wicked grin. "Do they also call themselves the Agency?"

He nodded. "One of em. Though, they play it straight when it comes to public relations. Unlike you guys." He took a sip from his Camelbak for a moment. "So. Why are you trying to kill the princess?"

She looked at him, as if considering him for a moment. He couldn't help but notice that the large creature behind her was glowing around its face again. The rest of the club was watching this conversation.

After a few more moments she answered. "I'm thinking that you probably already know the reason." She said. "It's likely quite similar to the reason your.... 'boogeymen'... agencies would do that same thing to a country."

He considered it. It was pretty obvious, he thought.

"Destabilization?" He asked. "Maybe some money, or some access to a resource you couldn't get otherwise?"

She simply grinned as she clapped her hands sarcastically.

"And Choi?" He asked.

This time she shrugged. "He's an.... unknown factor." She admitted. "And he thwarted our plans."

"Right. Just.... removing an obstacle then." He nodded. "Fair play I suppose." He shifted his rifle a bit higher, aiming at her face. "But no longer an option." He said with a tone that let her know he was serious. "You kill people from my world.... and you answer to my world."

She made a mocking pouty face.

"Oh?" She wondered. "And what would that entail?"

There was another tremor, and one of the empty shelves nearby clattered to the ground. He made a point of looking at it, and then back to her.

He smiled.

"Interesting." She said. "You do know that I could kill you even with that thing pointed at me. Right?"

"Probably." He admitted. "Magic is a hell of a.... unknown factor.... for me too." He paused. "You wouldn't survive it if you did though." He said, still smiling.

The creature behind her tensed a bit at the threat as the two of them stared at each other uncomfortably, each of them waiting for the other to back down.

Neither did. But Vickers still had questions to ask.

"So." He said, breaking the silence. "Do you guys really have your fingers in every pie?" He asked, hoping she understood the metaphor. "All over this world?"

She looked at him curiously. Then she looked at the still glowing creature. After a moment it nodded.

"More or less." She answered.

Vickers clicked his tongue as he considered the new information.

"Well then." He said as he stood up and dusted himself off a bit. The guard creature took a step forward. "My people back home would like to start a.... diplomatically advantageous.... relationship with you." He said as he lowered the weapon and reached into one of his cargo pockets.

"Do they now?" She asked as she watched him. "How smart of them?"

"Yeah." He answered. "After all, an organization with control over so much would be MUCH more helpful than some snobby royals."

She smiled as he pulled out a large rectangular object wrapped in brown paper.

"There it is." He said as he looked at it. "We don't have much time left." He admitted. "Even now a bunch of guys are riding down here on these big ass lizards to torch you guys." He held the object out. "You should go back through that door before they get here." He pointed at the large creature. "Is that thing expendable?" He asked.

She looked at it for a moment, surprised at the sudden change in the conversation. But there was a commotion coming from the tunnel entrance. Something was coming.

"Of course it is." She answered. "It's just a troll golem."

He nodded. "Well then leave it here. It'll help sell the story." He gestured at the item in his hand." "This is a very valuable substance on my world. A very powerful thing that not many people are allowed to have. You show this to anyone from my world and they'll pretty much do whatever you tell them." He said as she cautiously took it. "Consider it a.... diplomatic gift... from my people to yours."

She took it, looking at the small brown paper wrapped brick curiously.

He pointed at the device attached to the outside of it. "That's a communication device." He said as he pointed her at the door. "It'll let us get in touch with you when all this has settled down." He looked up at the golem, it's face STILL glowing. "Remember." He said, wagging a finger at it. "Choi.... and anyone else from my world... OFF LIMITS."

The creature nodded as the woman opened the door and stepped in a bit. He smiled and waved at the people he could see past her. One of them looked at him curiously, but waved back. Some of the other Agency members glared at them for it.

"You're not quite the brute that our agents had told us you were." She said, looking at him curiously.

He grinned. "Oh, I just have a uh... explosive.... personality." He said as he pulled the door shut.

He turned around to look at the massive creature.

It looked at him curiously. He noticed that its eyes weren't glowing anymore.

Perfect. He thought.

He raised his rifle up and shot it in the face three times before it could react.

"They should learn not to accept gifts from strangers." He said to himself as he walked into the hallway and around one of the corners into the side hallway.

He pulled the detonator from his vest and peeked around the corner at the still floating door.

"Merry Christmas assholes, enjoy the present." He said as he flipped the cover over and hit the toggle switch underneath it.

He wouldn't have been surprised if nothing had happened. He had no idea how the doors worked, much less whether his signal would go through it or not. But even if it didn't, the detonator was set to go off if it went more than ten seconds without receiving its standby signal.

So he was very VERY happy when the door shuddered, as if impacted by the worlds largest sledgehammer.

It flared with multicolored light for just a moment. Then it crashed to the ground and fell over. The handle popped out as it did.

He turned around, smiling from ear to ear, just in time to see Prince Artair come riding down the tunnel on his drake, covered in the gore of what he assumed had been some of the deep dark creatures the posse had encountered along the way. He had a pair of lanterns hanging from the sides of his drake's neck. They reminded Vickers of the headlights from his dads old Cadillac.

"Is this it?" The prince asked as he slid off of the creature. "Is this the agency?"

Vickers looked back for a second and nodded. "It was." He said. "I think they knew that that thing was coming and emptied out though." He added while gesturing at the remains of the Blight Possessed.

Artair kicked the thing. Then grabbed a lantern and headed into the actual room. Vickers pulled his glasses off, relieved to have an actual light source now, and pulled a chem-light from his vest and cracked it.

"Gods be damned." Artair said as he reached the golem. He held the lantern closer. "Is that a troll?" He asked.

"They said it was a 'Troll-Golem'?" Vickers said.

Artair looked at him with wide eyes. "YOU took down a troll-golem?" He asked with disbelief. He gestured for Vickers to go into the side tunnel and waved his drake forward. "Xhalya." He said as she entered the room. Then he pointed at the troll-golem's body. "Roast." He instructed her.

She obliged.

Then the rest of the posse entered the area and began looking around, and Vickers told them what had happened.

He didn't give them ALL of the details.

He left out the part where he had a few bricks of C4 left in his gear.

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Amina ran around the corner of a building, scattering a handful of rune stones behind her as she kept running.

Ten minutes after the last of the missiles had impacted, the wall had fallen.

The Blight Possessed had swarmed, emerging from the woods in numbers far greater than any they'd seen previously. A massive wave of creatures of all sizes and kinds flooding out as they fled the massive ball of fiery death that had engulfed the blighted lands and the forests outside of the wall alike.

One of the possessed drakes had managed to blast its way through the wall, and through a rank of soldiers and the militia behind that as well. It's "vanishing breath" had also caught her griffin in its sweep as well. It had narrowly missed her legs, but had caught the griffin's two rear legs and tail. The poor beast had begun panicking and thrashing as it flew, not understanding what had happened to it. She'd been forced to leap off of the creature onto one of the nearby roofs. She'd watched as a possessed dragon had flown right into the poor beast, vanishing it entirely.

That had been nearly an hour ago.

Now her forces were engaging in a desperate, and she thought futile, running form of city warfare with the remaining possessed.

The only consolation she had gotten was a radio message from Veliry informing her that no more of the creatures seemed to be emerging from the scorched wasteland outside of the wall.

The good news had been ruined somewhat by the mage then admitting that she couldn't hold her section of the wall anymore, and that the defensive forces were breaking.

She raced through the narrow alley, smiling at the sound of the explosions behind her.

She was about to look back to see the creature die. Then skidded to a halt as the wall in front of her and to the right vanished. She stopped just in time to avoid the field of the attack, but only barely. With her magically enhanced reflexes she watched as one of the stones that had been in her hand slipped out and flew forward, only to disappear inches after it had left her hand.

She pivoted and leaped upward, planting her foot on the wall and jumping back up onto the roof of the building that the new attacker had come from. She landed and began running.

Then the building began to collapse too. The creature inside had used its power to destabilize it.

She leaped, trying to get to the next building. But the now falling rooftop didn't give her anything to push off of.

She began to fall.

Instinctively, she drew her sword and shield.

Then she remembered hearing James's conversation with the General earlier.

She dropped the sword, and reached down to her belt.

She reached for the weapon James had given her before they'd parted.

She saw the creature, two creatures actually, a horse and it's royal guard rider. She smiled as she drew the weapon and flipped its safety off.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/urvnsb/wait_is_this_just_gate_149/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (148/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/up00og/wait_is_this_just_gate_147/) /
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"THE SHIPS ARE NEARLY FREE! HOLD THE WALL!" She shouted as loud as she could. "LET NONE THROUGH THE DEFENCES! DEFEND OUR PEOPLE! DEFEND YOUR FAMILIES!"

Then she plummeted back down for another attack sweep.

But not before she saw the closest of the missile strikes land only a few miles outside of the wall.

Her eyes widened as she saw the fireball bloom. The light of it leaving a spot on her vision before she felt her griffin begin struggle to maintain its dive.

She wanted to call out a warning. But then she was back in the fight.

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"Jeeeezus." Vickers said as he and the Agency member sat and looked at each other. The tremor had dislodged a bit of dirt from the ceiling. The young, he assumed fairy, woman looked up curiously. *They must be using the big stuff out there.* He thought.

"Your people responsible for that?" The woman asked him.

He shrugged. "I hope so." He said simply.

"So." She continued. "Why have you asked me to come here?"

He shrugged once more. "Honestly just wanted to get eyes on the people that had tried to kill the princess, and the young Captain Choi." He said. "Plus. Your... 'Agency'.... bears an uncanny resemblance to a few of the boogeymen from our world."

"Really?" She asked with a wicked grin. "Do they also call themselves the Agency?"

He nodded. "One of em. Though, they play it straight when it comes to public relations. Unlike you guys." He took a sip from his Camelbak for a moment. "So. Why are you trying to kill the princess?"

She looked at him, as if considering him for a moment. He couldn't help but notice that the large creature behind her was glowing around its face again. The rest of the club was watching this conversation.

After a few more moments she answered. "I'm thinking that you probably already know the reason." She said. "It's likely quite similar to the reason your.... 'boogeymen'... agencies would do that same thing to a country."

He considered it. It was pretty obvious, he thought.

"Destabilization?" He asked. "Maybe some money, or some access to a resource you couldn't get otherwise?"

She simply grinned as she clapped her hands sarcastically.

"And Choi?" He asked.

This time she shrugged. "He's an.... unknown factor." She admitted. "And he thwarted our plans."

"Right. Just.... removing an obstacle then." He nodded. "Fair play I suppose." He shifted his rifle a bit higher, aiming at her face. "But no longer an option." He said with a tone that let her know he was serious. "You kill people from my world.... and you answer to my world."

She made a mocking pouty face.

"Oh?" She wondered. "And what would that entail?"

There was another tremor, and one of the empty shelves nearby clattered to the ground. He made a point of looking at it, and then back to her.

He smiled.

"Interesting." She said. "You do know that I could kill you even with that thing pointed at me. Right?"

"Probably." He admitted. "Magic is a hell of a.... unknown factor.... for me too." He paused. "You wouldn't survive it if you did though." He said, still smiling.

The creature behind her tensed a bit at the threat as the two of them stared at each other uncomfortably, each of them waiting for the other to back down.

Neither did. But Vickers still had questions to ask.

"So." He said, breaking the silence. "Do you guys really have your fingers in every pie?" He asked, hoping she understood the metaphor. "All over this world?"

She looked at him curiously. Then she looked at the still glowing creature. After a moment it nodded.

"More or less." She answered.

Vickers clicked his tongue as he considered the new information.

"Well then." He said as he stood up and dusted himself off a bit. The guard creature took a step forward. "My people back home would like to start a.... diplomatically advantageous.... relationship with you." He said as he lowered the weapon and reached into one of his cargo pockets.

"Do they now?" She asked as she watched him. "How smart of them?"

"Yeah." He answered. "After all, an organization with control over so much would be MUCH more helpful than some snobby royals."

She smiled as he pulled out a large rectangular object wrapped in brown paper.

"There it is." He said as he looked at it. "We don't have much time left." He admitted. "Even now a bunch of guys are riding down here on these big ass lizards to torch you guys." He held the object out. "You should go back through that door before they get here." He pointed at the large creature. "Is that thing expendable?" He asked.

She looked at it for a moment, surprised at the sudden change in the conversation. But there was a commotion coming from the tunnel entrance. Something was coming.

"Of course it is." She answered. "It's just a troll golem."

He nodded. "Well then leave it here. It'll help sell the story." He gestured at the item in his hand." "This is a very valuable substance on my world. A very powerful thing that not many people are allowed to have. You show this to anyone from my world and they'll pretty much do whatever you tell them." He said as she cautiously took it. "Consider it a.... diplomatic gift... from my people to yours."

She took it, looking at the small brown paper wrapped brick curiously.

He pointed at the device attached to the outside of it. "That's a communication device." He said as he pointed her at the door. "It'll let us get in touch with you when all this has settled down." He looked up at the golem, it's face STILL glowing. "Remember." He said, wagging a finger at it. "Choi.... and anyone else from my world... OFF LIMITS."

The creature nodded as the woman opened the door and stepped in a bit. He smiled and waved at the people he could see past her. One of them looked at him curiously, but waved back. Some of the other Agency members glared at them for it.

"You're not quite the brute that our agents had told us you were." She said, looking at him curiously.

He grinned. "Oh, I just have a uh... explosive.... personality." He said as he pulled the door shut.

He turned around to look at the massive creature.

It looked at him curiously. He noticed that its eyes weren't glowing anymore.

Perfect. He thought.

He raised his rifle up and shot it in the face three times before it could react.

"They should learn not to accept gifts from strangers." He said to himself as he walked into the hallway and around one of the corners into the side hallway.

He pulled the detonator from his vest and peeked around the corner at the still floating door.

"Merry Christmas assholes, enjoy the present." He said as he flipped the cover over and hit the toggle switch underneath it.

He wouldn't have been surprised if nothing had happened. He had no idea how the doors worked, much less whether his signal would go through it or not. But even if it didn't, the detonator was set to go off if it went more than ten seconds without receiving its standby signal.

So he was very VERY happy when the door shuddered, as if impacted by the worlds largest sledgehammer.

It flared with multicolored light for just a moment. Then it crashed to the ground and fell over. The handle popped out as it did.

He turned around, smiling from ear to ear, just in time to see Prince Artair come riding down the tunnel on his drake, covered in the gore of what he assumed had been some of the deep dark creatures the posse had encountered along the way. He had a pair of lanterns hanging from the sides of his drake's neck. They reminded Vickers of the headlights from his dads old Cadillac.

"Is this it?" The prince asked as he slid off of the creature. "Is this the agency?"

Vickers looked back for a second and nodded. "It was." He said. "I think they knew that that thing was coming and emptied out though." He added while gesturing at the remains of the Blight Possessed.

Artair kicked the thing. Then grabbed a lantern and headed into the actual room. Vickers pulled his glasses off, relieved to have an actual light source now, and pulled a chem-light from his vest and cracked it.

"Gods be damned." Artair said as he reached the golem. He held the lantern closer. "Is that a troll?" He asked.

"They said it was a 'Troll-Golem'?" Vickers said.

Artair looked at him with wide eyes. "YOU took down a troll-golem?" He asked with disbelief. He gestured for Vickers to go into the side tunnel and waved his drake forward. "Xhalya." He said as she entered the room. Then he pointed at the troll-golem's body. "Roast." He instructed her.

She obliged.

Then the rest of the posse entered the area and began looking around, and Vickers told them what had happened.

He didn't give them ALL of the details.

He left out the part where he had a few bricks of C4 left in his gear.

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Amina ran around the corner of a building, scattering a handful of rune stones behind her as she kept running.

Ten minutes after the last of the missiles had impacted, the wall had fallen.

The Blight Possessed had swarmed, emerging from the woods in numbers far greater than any they'd seen previously. A massive wave of creatures of all sizes and kinds flooding out as they fled the massive ball of fiery death that had engulfed the blighted lands and the forests outside of the wall alike.

One of the possessed drakes had managed to blast its way through the wall, and through a rank of soldiers and the militia behind that as well. It's "vanishing breath" had also caught her griffin in its sweep as well. It had narrowly missed her legs, but had caught the griffin's two rear legs and tail. The poor beast had begun panicking and thrashing as it flew, not understanding what had happened to it. She'd been forced to leap off of the creature onto one of the nearby roofs. She'd watched as a possessed dragon had flown right into the poor beast, vanishing it entirely.

That had been nearly an hour ago.

Now her forces were engaging in a desperate, and she thought futile, running form of city warfare with the remaining possessed.

The only consolation she had gotten was a radio message from Veliry informing her that no more of the creatures seemed to be emerging from the scorched wasteland outside of the wall.

The good news had been ruined somewhat by the mage then admitting that she couldn't hold her section of the wall anymore, and that the defensive forces were breaking.

She raced through the narrow alley, smiling at the sound of the explosions behind her.

She was about to look back to see the creature die. Then skidded to a halt as the wall in front of her and to the right vanished. She stopped just in time to avoid the field of the attack, but only barely. With her magically enhanced reflexes she watched as one of the stones that had been in her hand slipped out and flew forward, only to disappear inches after it had left her hand.

She pivoted and leaped upward, planting her foot on the wall and jumping back up onto the roof of the building that the new attacker had come from. She landed and began running.

Then the building began to collapse too. The creature inside had used its power to destabilize it.

She leaped, trying to get to the next building. But the now falling rooftop didn't give her anything to push off of.

She began to fall.

Instinctively, she drew her sword and shield.

Then she remembered hearing James's conversation with the General earlier.

She dropped the sword, and reached down to her belt.

She reached for the weapon James had given her before they'd parted.

She saw the creature, two creatures actually, a horse and it's royal guard rider. She smiled as she drew the weapon and flipped its safety off.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/urvl1i/wait_is_this_just_gate_149/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (147/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/uo91gf/wait_is_this_just_gate_146/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I don't want to set the wooooorllldd on ffffiiiiirrreee! I just want to start.... a flame in your heeeeaaaarrrrttt!

See y'all on monday. Enjoy!

\~

"KEEP IT UP! KEEP SWITCHING THOSE MUNITIONS OUT! KEEP IT RANDOM!"

Amina yelled, using her Voice of Authority to let everyone on the battlements hear it.

The archers at the top of the walls continued to rain fire down upon the approaching Blight Possessed as she paced from one end of the walls to the others. Their loaders were keeping them stocked with arrows, alternating between standard arrows, bomb arrows, rune stone arrows, and the priceless spider glass arrows that some of the enchanters had spent the past few days pumping out of their labs. These arrows flew, and hit, just like regular arrows. But the material they were made of made them almost impossible to spot until it was too late. Even if you avoided one, the webbing that burst out of them was strong enough to keep a drake from moving for a while.

On top of the archer barrage Alixan and his talon of griffin riders, as well as the griffins from the city were dropping attacks of their own. More bombs, and rune stones, and massive blast darts were dropped. Plus the griffins, and the handful of dragons were also grabbing massive chunks of green laced stone from the rejection pile at the City's quarry and dropping them into the battle field.

Mages at the top of the wall blasted bolts of lightning, fireballs, clouds of deadly gas, large globs of acid, and may more types of spells into the fields. Veliry was holding nearly an entire stretch of the land outside the wall by herself. The deadly dark deathbolts she cast hitting any of the possessed that appeared before her. If the creatures managed to make them vanish then several others would arc around and hit them from behind after branching off from their main bolt. Veliry's whole body was glowing a series of colors as she practically blurred from one end of her section of wall to the other, casting like some kind of lightning elemental. A series of mages were on her section of wall

solely to heal her and build up energy stores of their own so she could leech off of them. A tactic considered taboo in anything but a world altering spell, like the summoning of the god's door.

The result of the multi faceted barrage kept the possessed from making any progress for long. There were numerous bodies littering the fields outside of the city walls. Even the few that did get close, were met by the flames and other breath attacks of a small squad of drakes that were roaming back and forth at the bottom of the walls.

Amina watched the creatures fall, and burst, and burn, with pride. She and her brother had come up with the plan themselves after James's radio message about the Possessed being able to adapt. They'd prioritized hitting the monsters with so many different effects, from so many different angles, that they couldn't adapt. Not fast enough.

But she knew the truth.

This was a battle that would only last as long as their supplies of ammunition did. And even then, only if the enemy didn't figure out some kind of workaround.

She looked toward the harbor lane, the massive gently curving waterway that intersected the city. The last few ships were still waiting to enter it and begin unloading their supplies and taking on the civilians of the city.

The dockworkers and ship captains there had made her incredibly proud of her people. All of them, almost to a man, had risen to the call of duty. The captains had all agreed to make as much space as possible, and take as many people on as they could before heading out to sea and anchoring in the bay. The dockworkers had taken their posts and begun receiving, labeling, and dispersing the cargo so that it would be out of the way of the evacuation and so that it could be returned to the ships when possible. Several of the captains had given permission to go through the cargo for anything that might help in the defense. As a result the city alchemists, enchanters, and mages had been able to add to the ammunition they were now using on the Blight Possessed, and many of the city guard were sporting new, more deadly weaponry.

She watched the ships for a moment, watched the teeming crowd of the people from the city heading to the nearest docking jetty and grabbing on to the netting on the sides of the ships, or stepping onto their landing platforms. The crowd was a fraction of the size it had been this morning.

She hoped they could all fit.

She looked at the militia that had mustered. Many of the people of the city had answered that call. They'd grabbed what weapons and armor they had and come to the location that Amina had designated. Some of them had only brought the clothes on their back, they'd gotten some of the gear that the ships had given.

She'd arranged them in ranks behind the infantry that were stationed on the inside of the wall. They were a last resort, meant only to be put into action if all else failed so that they could buy time for the evacuation.

She prayed to the gods that it didn't come to that.

A commotion snapped her out of her thoughts. Some of the archers in a nearby formation were upset. She rode over and stopped behind them.

"What's the matter?" She asked them.

"Look ma'am!" One of the younger soldiers said, pointing out past the wall.

She looked, and saw what was upsetting them so.

It was a large red drake with black speckling down its side. On its back was a dwarf in a set of ratty leather armor. The drake staggered and its tail twitched and spasmed.

It was one of the Blight Possessed.

"FIRE NOW!" She yelled. "DESTROY IT!"

The archers hastily grabbed whatever arrows the loaders had handed them and nocked them on their bowstrings.

"FIRE!" She yelled.

The archers released their volley. She saw the arrows arc forward, first up then down at the massive beast.

Its head tilted upward at an awkward arrow.

Its chest puffed out.

Then its mouth opened like it was going to breath fire. Amina braced herself, knowing she was about to feel the wave of heat.

But nothing came out.

And yet not a single arrow hit the creature.

"By the gods." She said to herself.

The creature hadn't breathed fire. It had breathed out its vanishing power, forward and farther than she'd seen any of the creatures effect anything.

She lifted her arm, bringing up the piece of shiny metal that was tied there and angled it towards the sky. A few moments later she heard a shrill whistle from above.

The drake began to move forward again. She looked and saw that the clan Drakrid members had gathered below and were slowly approaching it. They had their bows and ranged spells ready for a fight. They were furious at the possession of one of their own.

They were about to hit the distance where THEIR drakes, and potentially the possessed drake, would be able to breath death at each other.

Then a massive piece of green veined marble dropped from the sky, nearly twice the size of the possessed red drake, and splattered both it and its rider in a spray of gore unlike anything Amina had ever seen. Even the Clan Drakrid members flinched back at the sudden violence.

Amina looked up and saw her brother and several other members of his talon riding back up into the scant cloud cover. He waved at her, and she nodded back.

Then there was a commotion at one of the other sections.

She had a feeling that she knew what it was as she rode over.

But she stopped when she heard General Krick speaking over the radio suddenly.

She listened to the conversation.

Her jaw dropped as she heard the General's conversation with James.

She began frantically signalling up into the sky for her brother.

\---

James's left arm was almost numb. He'd done what he could to get some of the magical healing bandages he had packed onto it. But they weren't really made for broken bones, and he hoped they didn't cause anything to set wrong in his shoulder.

Steve was riding as hard as James had ever seen him go. It was as if the drake, whom James had always suspected of being smarter than normal, could sense his desperation.

He didn't know how long it had been since the General had given him the message. He was too focused on just trying to get to the city to pay any attention to his phone or anything else.

He also had to drop off the handful of drones he had in his saddle bags. He didn't know if he was spacing them out enough to last the full trip, or if the was dropping them off close enough to each other to keep having signal. But every couple of miles he would pull one out and hit the button on top that told them to set themselves up.

Between that and keeping an eye out for any more Blight Possessed he didn't have time for anything else. The bastards kept popping up every few dozen yards or so. Sometimes by themselves, sometimes in groups.

At one point he'd had to grab his rifle, struggling to aim it with only one hand, so that he could drop a creature that looked like a cross between a bull, a boar, and an owl. He'd been so inaccurate that he'd had to switch the weapon to full auto and just dump the mag into the thing. But it had worked..... barely.

He could see Jadesport now. Its white and green walls could only be maybe five miles or so away. He could see the lights of what he assumed were spells and drake fire blasting out from the walls. Could see the griffins in the sky swooping down and occasionally flying into the city to return with large bundles of things.

For the first time since he'd set off riding again, he pulled his phone out of his bag. It flashed its moisture warning and James chided himself for not remembering that.

Something moved to their right and he instinctively drew and aimed his pistol that way, leaving the phone pinned under his leg.

A person came running out of the woods. James gave them just a moment to announce themselves.

They didn't, and his pistol snapped as he shot them twice in the sternum and kept riding.

He spun the pistol in his grip, holding it with just his thumb as his fingers pulled the chamber back slightly. A trick he'd learned from a few of the other competitive shooters that let him check the chamber with one hand. Satisfied to see the brass of a round still loaded, he holstered it and grabbed his phone.

He was about to pin it under his bad arm and use some wind magic to try to dry out the port.

But then he heard something.

Something loud.

It sounded like a few of the roars he'd heard Steve make.

But it was far away.

And up above him.

And it wasn't stopping to take a breath like a drake would.

James pulled on Steve's reins and stopped him, spinning to look back and up.

He was too late.

James sighed. "Fuck." He said to himself.

High up, higher than even the flying dragon-kin had been riding, were a set of dark objects with long white contrails behind them. They were streaking toward the city, and several of them were already arcing down for their strikes.

He didn't know much about long range missiles. But James knew enough. He'd seen the effect they could have from the living room window of his family's apartment when he was a child.

And he was way too close to where they were going to hit.

There was nothing to it but to try.

He spun Steve back around, cracked a pistol shot at the mongrel dog that was running towards them from the direction of the city, and kicked him back into a run.

"C'mon boy!" He yelled at the drake as he stood in his stirrups and leaned forward. "Come on! Let's go!"

He looked back over his shoulder and saw one of the missiles descending toward the ground, dropping like a stone, only a mile or so north of him.

That'll be the one to do it. He thought to himself. He turned Steve away from it, angling a little more south of the blast. It wouldn't do much, but maybe, just maybe it'd make the difference.

Everything suddenly went quiet. He hadn't realized it before. Hadn't noticed the booms of the distant spells and explosions of the various projectiles that were being used. Or maybe he'd just gotten used to it over the course of the day. But suddenly it was so still.

He looked back and saw the expanding fireball of what could only be a thermobaric weapon. Not a nuke, thank god, but not too far off from one either.

He pulled Steve to a halt and jumped off. He stumbled when he landed, but ignored the pain and ran up to the front of the massive lizard. Steve looked down at him curiously and James used the motion to jump up and wrap his arms around Steve's head.

"I'm sorry boy." He said as he began to hear the roar of the explosion. The trees around them whipped towards the approaching fireball. James's clothes pulled from the suction of the pressure that the bombs were known for.

He began to draw energy into his hands. Damn the pain in his left arm. He had to try.

He let go of Steve, dropping a foot or so, and was about to try to create a hole for them to go into, a makeshift bunker.

Then a piece of a tree snapped behind him and the wind slammed it into his back. The impact wasn't hard, but it was enough to stagger him, a branch dug into his shoulder and broke his concentration.

He felt the air heat up, thought it was the bomb moving faster than he'd expected, then saw flames spew from Steve's mouth, incinerating something that had come to attack him.

"Come on!" He cried, focusing on the spell again. "Come on!"

He looked up.

It was almost here.

His spell wasn't going to be enough.

He fell to his knees in what little snow was left on the ground. His hair and clothes billowing around him as Steve hissed at the massive ball of fire in fear.

James reached up and touched the button on his neck.

"Amina." He said in. "I'm sorry." He had no way of knowing if she'd heard him. For all he knew the bombs might have been interfering with the signals. Who knew.

James closed his eyes just before a massive black creature slammed into the ground in front of him.

\----------

General Krick watched the feed from the drone closest to where the battle had been going on.

Fire suppression teams had flooded the room where the door had been opened and were putting out the fires that the seven missiles had caused on launch.

He watched as the first of the strikes impacted, and the expanding and contracting fireball spread until it had overtaken the drone he'd been watching, likely vaporizing the little thing instantly. As well as anyone and anything else that had been near it.

The feed switched to a different drone, further away. But the first fireball, and a few moments later the second, were still visible in the distance.

He took a deep breath.

If they hadn't put the fear of god into the Petravians before with Choi's firearm demonstrations and Vickers' one man rampage, this would do it. Not that that had been an objective.

"Any further word on the Captain?" He asked.

The techs, most of whom were civilian contractors, were all watching the displays in awe. Even the handful of other military personnel were watching slack jawed.

He couldn't blame them. Firepower like that hadn't been used since most of the people in the room were still in elementary school.

He raised his voice.

"Does anyone..... have info.... on Choi!?!" He asked again.

The volume and tone of his voice snapped them out of their daze. A moment later one of them spoke.

"Last contact was a drone drop. Part of the trail of crumbs he was leaving as he moved toward the city sir." They said. "It dropped out of contact once the first missile broke the trail."

Another tech added to it. "We have a radio transmission that occurred just after the third strike. But... it's garbled, the atmospheric disturbance from the bombs interfered with it a bit too much. Plus it was probably noisy."

"Any idea where he was based on last known?" The General asked.

One of the techs sent the map of the projected strike zones. It also had a small line of dots marking where Choi had dropped drones during his mad dash to the city.

"We adjusted the flight path of missile number four to try to avoid his location." One of the soldiers in the room said. "But it's hard to tell with thermo's sir. Also, spear six went off line before its strike. We think it might have hit one of the blight patches in the sky. Its sensors went completely offline instantly."

Great. He thought as he shook his head. *Now there's a chance that these Blight bastards have one of our missiles.*

He didn't say it. Instead he said, "Ideally it just slammed into the ground and got vaporized by the other ones." He paused as he thought about what to do next. "How long until we can get the door knocker back up?"

Another tech spoke. "Fires are almost out sir. We should be able to assess damage within the next hour or so.

He looked back at the map and its trail of dots.

"Prioritize that." He said. "We need to see what we can do to get eyes on our men. What's the situation with Vickers?"

\----------

Vickers watched with curiosity as the handle of the door began to move.

He tapped a command on his tablet, activating its heart monitor function. Then he flipped a switch on one of the devices in his cargo pocket.

He liked having backup plans.

The door opened and a small, green skinned, young girl calmly walked out of it. He looked past her for a moment and saw what looked like a meeting room on the other side. There were people in each of the seats.

They were all staring at him through the door.

The small girl quickly shut the door right before a warning popped up on the HUD on Vicker's glasses.

Poison gas? He wondered. *How are they all just... chillin in there?*

"What can we do for you?" The girl asked in a startlingly sultry and adult voice.

Vickers' eyebrow cocked at the unexpectedly nice voice.

Then he noticed the points on her ears, and the way she seemed to be hovering just off the ground even though she moved like she was walking.

This wasn't just a kid. This was some kind of elf or something. Or at least that was what he assumed.

"You the agency?" He asked.

She stared at him curiously. Her eyes flared a light purple.

Vickers rifle snapped up, aiming at her chest.

"I wouldn't do anything that makes me uncomfortable if I were you." He said. "I'm very quick to shoot."

Her eyes darkened again and she looked at the dead body of "Roylan" behind him.

"I see that." She said. "So these..... guns.... are as deadly as they say."

"It aint the only deadly thing in this room." Vickers replied.

She smiled at that. "You have no idea." She said as she float-walked over to a chair a few yards away and facing him. She sat down, but Vickers noticed that even sitting, she seemed to hover a few inches above the seat. "What can I do for you Chief Vickers?" She asked.

"I guess that word of my deeds travel far." He said. "Or you guys really do have spies everywhere."

She simply continued smiling.

"So." He continued. "Why are you assholes trying to kill my boy Choi and his girlfriend?"

She smiled as she began to talk.

But Vickers never took his rifle off of her.

He also never stopped his body camera from recording.

All he had to do was buy time until backup arrived.

Then he'd get to have some fun with these assholes.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ur3s8g/wait_is_this_just_gate_148/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (147/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/uo8zdi/wait_is_this_just_gate_146/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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See y'all on monday. Enjoy!

PS: Weekly reminder that r/GATEhouse *is a thing now.*

\~

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The archers at the top of the walls continued to rain fire down upon the approaching Blight Possessed as she paced from one end of the walls to the others. Their loaders were keeping them stocked with arrows, alternating between standard arrows, bomb arrows, rune stone arrows, and the priceless spider glass arrows that some of the enchanters had spent the past few days pumping out of their labs. These arrows flew, and hit, just like regular arrows. But the material they were made of made them almost impossible to spot until it was too late. Even if you avoided one, the webbing that burst out of them was strong enough to keep a drake from moving for a while.

On top of the archer barrage Alixan and his talon of griffin riders, as well as the griffins from the city were dropping attacks of their own. More bombs, and rune stones, and massive blast darts were dropped. Plus

the griffins, and the handful of dragons were also grabbing massive chunks of green laced stone from the rejection pile at the City's quarry and dropping them into the battle field.

Mages at the top of the wall blasted bolts of lightning, fireballs, clouds of deadly gas, large globs of acid, and may more types of spells into the fields. Veliry was holding nearly an entire stretch of the land outside the wall by herself. The deadly dark deathbolts she cast hitting any of the possessed that appeared before her. If the creatures managed to make them vanish then several others would arc around and hit them from behind after branching off from their main bolt. Veliry's whole body was glowing a series of colors as she practically blurred from one end of her section of wall to the other, casting like some kind of lightning elemental. A series of mages were on her section of wall solely to heal her and build up energy stores of their own so she could leech off of them. A tactic considered taboo in anything but a world altering spell, like the summoning of the god's door.

The result of the multi faceted barrage kept the possessed from making any progress for long. There were numerous bodies littering the fields outside of the city walls. Even the few that did get close, were met by the flames and other breath attacks of a small squad of drakes that were roaming back and forth at the bottom of the walls.

Amina watched the creatures fall, and burst, and burn, with pride. She and her brother had come up with the plan themselves after James's radio message about the Possessed being able to adapt. They'd prioritized hitting the monsters with so many different effects, from so many different angles, that they couldn't adapt. Not fast enough.

But she knew the truth.

This was a battle that would only last as long as their supplies of ammunition did. And even then, only if the enemy didn't figure out some kind of workaround.

She looked toward the harbor lane, the massive gently curving waterway that intersected the city. The last few ships were still waiting to enter it and begin unloading their supplies and taking on the civilians of the city.

The dockworkers and ship captains there had made her incredibly proud of her people. All of them, almost to a man, had risen to the call of duty. The captains had all agreed to make as much space as possible, and take as many people on as they could before heading out to sea and anchoring in the bay. The dockworkers had taken their posts and begun receiving, labeling, and dispersing the cargo so that it would be out of the way of the evacuation and so that it could be returned to the ships when possible. Several of the captains had given permission to go through the cargo for anything that might help in the defense. As a result the city alchemists, enchanters, and mages had been able to add to the ammunition they were now using on the Blight Possessed, and many of the city guard were sporting new, more deadly weaponry.

She watched the ships for a moment, watched the teeming crowd of the people from the city heading to the nearest docking jetty and grabbing on to the netting on the sides of the ships, or stepping onto their landing platforms. The crowd was a fraction of the size it had been this morning.

She hoped they could all fit.

She looked at the militia that had mustered. Many of the people of the city had answered that call. They'd grabbed what weapons and armor they had and come to the location that Amina had designated. Some of them had only brought the clothes on their back, they'd gotten some of the gear that the ships had given.

She'd arranged them in ranks behind the infantry that were stationed on the inside of the wall. They were a last resort, meant only to be put into action if all else failed so that they could buy time for the evacuation.

She prayed to the gods that it didn't come to that.

A commotion snapped her out of her thoughts. Some of the archers in a nearby formation were upset. She rode over and stopped behind them.

"What's the matter?" She asked them.

"Look ma'am!" One of the younger soldiers said, pointing out past the wall.

She looked, and saw what was upsetting them so.

It was a large red drake with black speckling down its side. On its back was a dwarf in a set of ratty leather armor. The drake staggered and its tail twitched and spasmed.

It was one of the Blight Possessed.

"FIRE NOW!" She yelled. "DESTROY IT!"

The archers hastily grabbed whatever arrows the loaders had handed them and nocked them on their bowstrings.

"FIRE!" She yelled.

The archers released their volley. She saw the arrows arc forward, first up then down at the massive beast.

Its head tilted upward at an awkward arrow.

Its chest puffed out.

Then its mouth opened like it was going to breath fire. Amina braced herself, knowing she was about to feel the wave of heat.

But nothing came out.

And yet not a single arrow hit the creature.

"By the gods." She said to herself.

The creature hadn't breathed fire. It had breathed out its vanishing power, forward and farther than she'd seen any of the creatures effect anything.

She lifted her arm, bringing up the piece of shiny metal that was tied there and angled it towards the sky. A few moments later she heard a shrill whistle from above.

The drake began to move forward again. She looked and saw that the clan Drakrid members had gathered below and were slowly approaching it. They had their bows and ranged spells ready for a fight. They were furious at the possession of one of their own.

They were about to hit the distance where THEIR drakes, and potentially the possessed drake, would be able to breath death at each other.

Then a massive piece of green veined marble dropped from the sky, nearly twice the size of the possessed red drake, and splattered both it and its rider in a spray of gore unlike anything Amina had ever seen. Even the Clan Drakrid members flinched back at the sudden violence.

Amina looked up and saw her brother and several other members of his talon riding back up into the scant cloud cover. He waved at her, and she nodded back.

Then there was a commotion at one of the other sections.

She had a feeling that she knew what it was as she rode over.

But she stopped when she heard General Krick speaking over the radio suddenly.

She listened to the conversation.

Her jaw dropped as she heard the General's conversation with James.

She began frantically signalling up into the sky for her brother.

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James's left arm was almost numb. He'd done what he could to get some of the magical healing bandages he had packed onto it. But they weren't really made for broken bones, and he hoped they didn't cause anything to set wrong in his shoulder.

Steve was riding as hard as James had ever seen him go. It was as if the drake, whom James had always suspected of being smarter than normal, could sense his desperation.

He didn't know how long it had been since the General had given him the message. He was too focused on just trying to get to the city to pay any attention to his phone or anything else.

He also had to drop off the handful of drones he had in his saddle bags. He didn't know if he was spacing them out enough to last the full trip, or if the was dropping them off close enough to each other to keep having signal. But every couple of miles he would pull one out and hit the button on top that told them to set themselves up.

Between that and keeping an eye out for any more Blight Possessed he didn't have time for anything else. The bastards kept popping up every few dozen yards or so. Sometimes by themselves, sometimes in groups.

At one point he'd had to grab his rifle, struggling to aim it with only one hand, so that he could drop a creature that looked like a cross between a bull, a boar, and an owl. He'd been so inaccurate that he'd had to switch the weapon to full auto and just dump the mag into the thing. But it had worked..... barely.

He could see Jadesport now. Its white and green walls could only be maybe five miles or so away. He could see the lights of what he assumed were spells and drake fire blasting out from the walls. Could see the griffins in the sky swooping down and occasionally flying into the city to return with large bundles of things.

For the first time since he'd set off riding again, he pulled his phone out of his bag. It flashed its moisture warning and James chided himself for not remembering that.

Something moved to their right and he instinctively drew and aimed his pistol that way, leaving the phone pinned under his leg.

A person came running out of the woods. James gave them just a moment to announce themselves.

They didn't, and his pistol snapped as he shot them twice in the sternum and kept riding.

He spun the pistol in his grip, holding it with just his thumb as his fingers pulled the chamber back slightly. A trick he'd learned from a few of the other competitive shooters that let him check the chamber with one hand. Satisfied to see the brass of a round still loaded, he holstered it and grabbed his phone.

He was about to pin it under his bad arm and use some wind magic to try to dry out the port.

But then he heard something.

Something loud.

It sounded like a few of the roars he'd heard Steve make.

But it was far away.

And up above him.

And it wasn't stopping to take a breath like a drake would.

James pulled on Steve's reins and stopped him, spinning to look back and up.

He was too late.

James sighed. "Fuck." He said to himself.

High up, higher than even the flying dragon-kin had been riding, were a set of dark objects with long white contrails behind them. They were streaking toward the city, and several of them were already arcing down for their strikes.

He didn't know much about long range missiles. But James knew enough. He'd seen the effect they could have from the living room window of his family's apartment when he was a child.

And he was way too close to where they were going to hit.

There was nothing to it but to try.

He spun Steve back around, cracked a pistol shot at the mongrel dog that was running towards them from the direction of the city, and kicked him back into a run.

"C'mon boy!" He yelled at the drake as he stood in his stirrups and leaned forward. "Come on! Let's go!"

He looked back over his shoulder and saw one of the missiles descending toward the ground, dropping like a stone, only a mile or so north of him.

That'll be the one to do it. He thought to himself. He turned Steve away from it, angling a little more south of the blast. It wouldn't do much, but maybe, just maybe it'd make the difference.

Everything suddenly went quiet. He hadn't realized it before. Hadn't noticed the booms of the distant spells and explosions of the various projectiles that were being used. Or maybe he'd just gotten used to it over the course of the day. But suddenly it was so still.

He looked back and saw the expanding fireball of what could only be a thermobaric weapon. Not a nuke, thank god, but not too far off from one either.

He pulled Steve to a halt and jumped off. He stumbled when he landed, but ignored the pain and ran up to the front of the massive lizard. Steve looked down at him curiously and James used the motion to jump up and wrap his arms around Steve's head.

"I'm sorry boy." He said as he began to hear the roar of the explosion. The trees around them whipped towards the approaching fireball. James's clothes pulled from the suction of the pressure that the bombs were known for.

He began to draw energy into his hands. Damn the pain in his left arm. He had to try.

He let go of Steve, dropping a foot or so, and was about to try to create a hole for them to go into, a makeshift bunker.

Then a piece of a tree snapped behind him and the wind slammed it into his back. The impact wasn't hard, but it was enough to stagger him, a branch dug into his shoulder and broke his concentration.

He felt the air heat up, thought it was the bomb moving faster than he'd expected, then saw flames spew from Steve's mouth, incinerating something that had come to attack him.

"Come on!" He cried, focusing on the spell again. "Come on!"

He looked up.

It was almost here.

His spell wasn't going to be enough.

He fell to his knees in what little snow was left on the ground. His hair and clothes billowing around him as Steve hissed at the massive ball of fire in fear.

James reached up and touched the button on his neck.

"Amina." He said into his throat mic. "I'm sorry." He had no way of knowing if she'd heard him. For all he knew the bombs might have been interfering with the signals. Who knew.

James closed his eyes just before a massive black creature slammed into the ground in front of him.

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General Krick watched the feed from the drone closest to where the battle had been going on.

Fire suppression teams had flooded the room where the door had been opened and were putting out the fires that the seven missiles had caused on launch.

He watched as the first of the strikes impacted, and the expanding and contracting fireball spread until it had overtaken the drone he'd been watching, likely vaporizing the little thing instantly. As well as anyone and anything else that had been near it.

The feed switched to a different drone, further away. But the first fireball, and a few moments later the second, were still visible in the distance.

He took a deep breath.

If they hadn't put the fear of god into the Petravians before with Choi's firearm demonstrations and Vickers' one man rampage, this would do it. Not that that had been an objective.

"Any further word on the Captain?" He asked.

The techs, most of whom were civilian contractors, were all watching the displays in awe. Even the handful of other military personnel were watching slack jawed.

He couldn't blame them. Firepower like that hadn't been used since most of the people in the room were still in elementary school.

He raised his voice.

"Does anyone..... have info.... on Choi!?!" He asked again.

The volume and tone of his voice snapped them out of their daze. A moment later one of them spoke.

"Last contact was a drone drop. Part of the trail of crumbs he was leaving as he moved toward the city sir." They said. "It dropped out of contact once the first missile broke the trail."

Another tech added to it. "We have a radio transmission that occurred just after the third strike. But... it's garbled, the atmospheric disturbance from the bombs interfered with it a bit too much. Plus it was probably noisy."

"Any idea where he was based on last known?" The General asked.

One of the techs sent the map of the projected strike zones. It also had a small line of dots marking where Choi had dropped drones during his mad dash to the city.

"We adjusted the flight path of missile number four to try to avoid his location." One of the soldiers in the room said. "But it's hard to tell with thermo's sir. Also, spear six went off line before its strike. We think it might have hit one of the blight patches in the sky. Its sensors went completely offline instantly."

Great. He thought as he shook his head. *Now there's a chance that these Blight bastards have one of our missiles.*

He didn't say it. Instead he said, "Ideally it just slammed into the ground and got vaporized by the other ones." He paused as he thought about what to do next. "How long until we can get the door knocker back up?"

Another tech spoke. "Fires are almost out sir. We should be able to assess damage within the next hour or so.

He looked back at the map and its trail of dots.

"Prioritize that." He said. "We need to see what we can do to get eyes on our men. What's the situation with Vickers?"

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Vickers watched with curiosity as the handle of the door began to move.

He tapped a command on his tablet, activating its heart monitor function. Then he flipped a switch on one of the devices in his cargo pocket.

He liked having backup plans.

The door opened and a small, green skinned, young girl calmly walked out of it. He looked past her for a moment and saw what looked like a meeting room on the other side. There were people in each of the seats.

They were all staring at him through the door.

The small girl quickly shut the door right before a warning popped up on the HUD on Vicker's glasses.

Poison gas? He wondered. *How are they all just... chillin in there?*

"What can we do for you?" The girl asked in a startlingly sultry and adult voice.

Vickers' eyebrow cocked at the unexpectedly nice voice.

Then he noticed the points on her ears, and the way she seemed to be hovering just off the ground even though she moved like she was walking.

This wasn't just a kid. This was some kind of elf or something. Or at least that was what he assumed.

"You the agency?" He asked.

She stared at him curiously. Her eyes flared a light purple.

Vickers rifle snapped up, aiming at her chest.

"I wouldn't do anything that makes me uncomfortable if I were you." He said. "I'm very quick to shoot."

Her eyes darkened again and she looked at the dead body of "Roylan" behind him.

"I see that." She said. "So these..... guns.... are as deadly as they say."

"It aint the only deadly thing in this room." Vickers replied.

She smiled at that. "You have no idea." She said as she float-walked over to a chair a few yards away and facing him. She sat down, but Vickers noticed that even sitting, she seemed to hover a few inches above the seat. "What can I do for you Chief Vickers?" She asked.

"I guess that word of my deeds travel far." He said. "Or you guys really do have spies everywhere."

She simply continued smiling.

"So." He continued. "Why are you assholes trying to kill my boy Choi and his girlfriend?"

She smiled as she began to talk.

But Vickers never took his rifle off of her.

He also never stopped his body camera from recording.

All he had to do was buy time until backup arrived.

Then he'd get to have some fun with these assholes.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ur3qs5/wait_is_this_just_gate_148/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (146/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/unhw55/wait_is_this_just_gate_145/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Little secret. I have very few things planned out in this series. At least when it comes to action sequences and what not. There's a few over-arching goals for the series, but that's about it. Often times I begin writing and I end up going down a narrative path that even makes me go "Huh, unexpected." Then I flesh it out.

Enjoy.

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It didn't take long for James to figure out the effect that his rounds were having.

After seeing the things ignore drake-fire, spells, rune stones, old school bombs, poisonous gas, and so much more, it became really noticeable that his rifle was still killing them. Even aiming it at the things was enough to make them stop in their tracks now, and they looked at it with, what he thought was, fear.

He didn't know why his rifle and, after a quick test, his pistol were so effective against the things. He didn't really care. It worked, and that was all that mattered.

He..... regretted.... roping Clan Drakrid into this.

He regretted coming here, and also mustering the forces he had in general.

This wasn't a battle any more. It hadn't been since those first few minutes, when the Blight Possessed had adapted to the attacks that had proven effective.

The great battle that they'd been planning, had turned into a slaughter.

And now that drakes, and even a handful of the flying mounts were beginning to emerge, albeit only from the largest of the blight patches, it was getting even more one sided.

He didn't know what was going on in Jadesport. He didn't know where Kela was. Or Gixelle. Or anyone for that matter.

He'd known that a dwarf on top of a long green drake had been riding with him on his left. Their drakes fire and the wave of acid that the dwarf could spray from his hands had claimed more than a few of the possessed. Then a large black boar had come rushing from the woods and tackled his drake, vanishing most of its torso in the process. It had taken the dwarf's legs too.

James had shot the boar creature in the head and torso several times. But he didn't stop riding. He couldn't. The creatures were everywhere. He heard the dwarf yelling out his drake's name as he rode. Then the yelling stopped.

Steve had lost part of his tail. James wasn't sure if the drake was even aware of it. According to Sigbert the damage to his arm hadn't hurt at all. James hoped that held true for Steve. James had shot the Possessed that had done it immediately and gotten Steve out of there.

Now he was alone.

He could hear what was left of the battle continuing around him. The whooshing noise that meant a drake was breathing death. The crackles and bangs of spells and various explosives. The yells of the riders and the screeching roars of their mounts as they struggled to survive. Somewhere nearby someone, a woman from the sound of the voice, was crying out a name and sobbing. Whether it was her bonded mount, or another rider she cared for, he didn't know.

This had been a mistake.

Once the Possessed had gotten into the midst of the formation, they'd had no choice but to break ranks. The drakes couldn't use their breath

weapons if there was a chance of it hitting the riders around them. So they'd spread out to try and draw the creatures into separate formations and kill them that way. Once again it had only worked for a moment.

It hadn't been long after that that the formation had actually broken once and for all. The small groups of three to five riders had begun to fall apart and scatter until eventually there hadn't been any formation left. Just a bunch of Clan Drakrid members doing what they could to survive.

Some had stayed and fought. James suspected that he'd be seeing them again, as members of the Blight Possessed.

Others had run. He had a feeling that most of them would be okay, as long as they got away from the handful of flying possessed that now flew about.

James wasn't completely certain which of those groups he fell into. He was running. That was for sure. But he was still fighting and doing everything he could to kill any of the creatures he came across. Besides, he knew he wasn't running towards safety.

The fight here was over. All that was left was surviving, and maybe taking a few down when they finally caught you.

He was heading towards Jadesport.

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Vickers flinched back as a wave of fire burst from the new opening in the rock.

He looked on in disbelief as the fire hit the "Roylan" creature and seemed to disappear instantly, leaving them completely unharmed and not getting anywhere near Vickers as a result.

It was one thing to see footage or come across the aftermath of the thing's vanishing ability. It was another entirely to see it in action. He didn't wanna admit that he was thankful for it either. That flame WOULD have reached him if the creature hadn't been there.

As the fire cleared Vickers saw a massive creature standing on the other side.

Even from this distance he estimated that it had to be close to twelve feet tall. Its hands glowed with the familiar light of magic. It moved toward "Roylan" and attempted to grab him in its massive hands.

Vickers moved up, rifle still raised as he watched the large creature's arm disappear up to its elbow. It recoiled in shock and looked at its now missing limb.

Then it did something Vickers, and judging from its step back "Roylan" as well, hadn't expected.

It ripped the arm off at the bicep.

Vickers froze as he saw the display of self mutilation, and watched in awe as the creature casually tossed the detached limb aside.

Then a new one rapidly grew to replace it.

"Well." Vickers said to himself as he skidded to a halt. "That's a bit of a game changer."

He decided to keep his distance and kneeled down where he was.

"Who are you, that you would intrude upon this place." The creature asked in a voice so deep and gravelly that Vickers could barely understand it.

"I am a herald." The blight possessed answerede. "I have been sent to speak to your masters on behalf of my own."

Vickers' eyes furrowed at the suddenly smooth speaking style that "Roylan" had taken on out of nowhere. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought that the thing had been speaking its whole life. When, only a few minutes earlier, it had sounded like someone playing a series of disjointed soundbites from a recording.

"And who is your master? Why would they send you to us?" The large creature asked in return.

"I serve the cleansing. I have been sent to warn your masters that, if they have the ability, they should do whatever they can to get themselves and as many people as they care to take, off of this world." The possessed paused. "Specifically; out of this plane of existence."

The large creature leaned down, though it didn't make the mistake of getting too close, and peered into "Roylan's" face.

"And why is that?" It asked.

"Because..... The gods are done with this universe. They are wringing out the last few drops of entertainment and energy from it that they care to take." It made a motion with its hands that Vickers recognized as wringing out a towel. "Once that's done. The Cleansing will occur, and make room for a new world."

The large creatures eyes and ears glowed a dull red color for a moment and it tilted its head.

"Understood my lords." It said to itself as it looked back at the smaller creature in front of it. **"Consider your message delivered. Now leave."**

"Roylan" bowed awkwardly. Then began to head towards Vickers.

"Hold the fuck up!" Vickers yelled as he rose up and walked forward.

The large creature looked at him curiously, as though noticing him for the first time. It's eyes and ears glowed again.

"That's it?" Vickers asked. "That's all you came all this way for?"

"Roylan" Smiled the creepy smile he'd used before.

"I told you that I was simply a herald." It replied.

"No no no." Vickers replied. "You killed a lot of people back there." He pointed his rifle at the large creature that was still in the chamber. "And you! You're with the Agency. Right?"

The large creature didn't move or answer. But Vickers thought he saw anger appear on its face.

"Answer me." Vickers said.

"The people at the camp attacked me." The Blight Possessed replied. "And I didn't kill them. Not really. I simply.... sent them through."

Vickers' rifle switched back to "Roylan"

"Yeah. And what the fuck does that mean?" He asked.

"They are now like me." It replied. "And when the cleansing occurs. They will be available for the gods to seed the next world. Eventually."

"And I...." The large creature said before Vickers could say any more. **"Do not answer to you, interloper."**

POP!

Smoke curled from the end of Vicker's rifle as "Roylan" staggered backwards and fell against the wall. It was looking down at the small hole in its chest and jerked forward as if trying to rise up to its feet again. But the bullet had hit dead center, and its spine was shattered.

"Roylan" Raised his hands up and looked at Vickers with what, on a normal under control face, would have been anger. It was about to bring its hands forward, Vickers assumed to attack him with its power. He didn't let that happen.

POP!

Another round slammed into "Roylan's" left cheek bone and exploded that side of its head off.

The body fell to the ground and lay limp.

POP! POP! POP!

Three more rounds hit the thing in the neck, chest again, and pelvis in rapid succession.

The large creature simply looked at it curiously for a moment, its eyes and ears still glowing.

Vickers shifted his rifle back to aiming at it.

"You must be from the same place as the summoned hero." It said. **"Is this weapon one of these.... pistols?"**

Vickers didn't answer. Instead the two of them stared at each other for several long seconds.

Vickers gestured at the creature. "Your bosses are watchin' this. Aint they?" He asked.

The creature thought for a moment. Then it nodded.

Vickers lowered his weapon. As he did he also hit a button on his tablet that let the people up above know he'd found the location they'd been looking for.

"I'd like to speak with them." He said.

The creature looked at him with a hint of curiosity. Then the red glow dissipated from it's eyes and ears.

It stepped aside and gestured at a doorway inside the room. It reminded Vickers of the one that had been on the church his mom used to take him to when he was a kid. Only it wasn't attached to anything and seemed to be hovering just a few inches off the ground.

He walked forward slowly, hand still on the grip of his rifle. He kicked "Roylan" as he passed. The former herald didn't move at all.

So much for the boogeyman. He thought.

"Go through." The massive thing said as he walked past.

Vickers looked at the floating door. Then looked around at the room. There were other doors scattered about. None of them were floating like this one was. The room looked like it had just been cleaned. He could see scuff marks on the floor where there had once been furniture, and saw a few chairs off to the side.

He looked back up at the creature.

"No." He said simply. "They can come here. I aint goin through no weird fuckin door off to who the fuck knows where."

"No." It replied simply.

Vickers gripped his rifle a bit tighter, unsure as to what effect it would have against the massive, regenerative, seemingly armored creature. With his other hand he waved at the things face.

"Do the funky little glowy thing and talk to em. Tell em to send someone prettier over so we can chat. But I aint goin through no fuckin door." He said.

The creature stared at him. Then its eyes glowed again.

Vickers sat in one of the discarded chairs as he waited. He was startled at how comfortable it was for being made of, what he assumed was, stone.

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James hadn't heard any sign of battle for several minutes now as he rode. Even the last bit of commotion he had heard had been far away. So he jumped when his phone went off in his pocket. It was on silent, but the vibration had still caught him off guard. He'd forgotten that he even had the thing.

He scanned his surroundings, and after a moment of not seeing anything moving, lowered his rifle and pulled the phone out of his belt pouch.

His hands were trembling so bad that he almost dropped it. He pulled a a tab on his radio and an audio cord extended out from it. He plugged it into his phone's only port and sent the audio to his earpiece as he hit the green button.

"Yes sir?" He answered.

General Krick answered.

"Captain Choi you need to get out of there time now." He said in a raised and frantic voice.

"Already on it sir. This whole thing's gone to shit." He responded.

"We know. But we saw you heading southeast before we lost visual on you. Where the hell are you going?"

"Jadesport sir. I need to warn them. And help them if I can." He responded.

"Negative Choi. We've got a fire mission coming in on the blighted zone." The General said.

James stared at his phone in confusion.

What... the.... fuck? He wondered to himself.

"Um.... Sir?" He said. "Could you repeat that last? It sounded like you-"

The General cut him off.

"WE'VE GOT FIRE INCOMING CAPTAIN! WE'RE GONNA BOMB THE WHOLE DAMN BLIGHTED ZONE AND HOPE LIKE HELL THAT THEY HAVE THE SAME EFFECT THAT YOUR RIFLE AND PISTOL HAD!" He yelled into James's ear. "GET ANYONE NEARBY, AND EITHER GET THE HELL OUT, OR USE THAT MAGIC OF YOURS TO GET UNDERGROUND! DANGER CLOSE CAPTAIN!"

James stared at the phone again.

He was about to respond when something collided with his body.

The phone flew out of his hand, detaching from the cord and causing it to wind itself back up into the radio set.

James flew off of Steve's back, feeling some strange sensation that he'd never felt before. A kind of ripping, tearing, sucking sensation that effected every part of his body that had been impacted by whatever had hit him.

He hit the ground and was startled at how hard the impact was. Something slammed to the ground off to the side.

He rolled over onto his side, surprised to feel snow and dirt under his hands. He looked at his hands for just a split second.

"Where the fuck are my gauntlets?" He asked. Then he noticed that his arms were completely unarmored.

He raised himself up and was surprised to find that he was only wearing his green undershirt and his uniform pants. But all his armor was gone. Oddly, his bottomless bags were still strapped to his shoulder, though they felt hot on his back. His rifle was still slung too, though it was much looser without his armor on.

His head snapped up to whatever had impacted him.

It was a wolf, and one of its eyes was staring right at him.

Oh shit. He thought as it charged.

He was about to grab the rifle and raise it when a spout of fire, edged in black, burst forth and engulfed the creature.

He backed up, away from the heat.

Then he saw the wolf still charging.

No, it was leaping now.

Leaping at him.

Ignoring. No. Vanishing Steve's attack.

He felt the magic flood into his head and eyes, and saw the wolf slow down to a crawl.

He tried to raise his rifle. But the former wolf was too close.

He only got a single shot off before it impacted him and bowled him over onto his back and knocking the rifle down and away. His shot had taken off one of its rear legs. But it hadn't killed it.

He felt that sensation again. That tearing, sucking, sensation.

It hurt.

But not physically.

It felt as though his entire body was being torn on the inside.

It felt like he was becoming weaker.

The world blurred in his vision, even as he felt the not-wolf's claws begin to rake his shoulders and legs.

He felt the ground tremor as something large approached.

Heard Steve roaring.

"STAY BACK!" He yelled. "DON'T TRY TO ATTACK IT!" He told the drake. He knew Steve was trying to protect him.

The wolf bit down on his shoulder and James cried out in pain. Even through the strange sensation he felt the bite.

He heard his left collar bone snap and his vision faded even more.

He didn't feel his right hand follow its instincts.

BA-BA-BANG!!!

His pistol cycled so fast that if he hadn't known better he might have thought it had been a single shot.

The wolf went limp on top of him as the three bullets tore through it, ignoring the vanishing defense it had just like with the others.

It's Jaw remained locked on James's shoulder, and he saw the eyes moving about, looking for the new threat.

James felt blood soaking his whole shoulder as the teeth bit deeper.

He brought the pistol up to where he could see it, and pressed the barrel to the side of the wolf's head. The eye on that side spun to look at it.

BANG! The shot was muffled by the Blight Possessed wolf's head this time. James watched with disgust as its brains and bits of skull exploded out of the side of its head.

Its jaw finally relented in its grasp.

James stayed there for a moment. He only started moving again when Steve walked over and grabbed the wolf in his teeth and threw it.

The massive drake nuzzled up to James and licked him, letting out a light whimper. James patted Steve's snout.

"I'm...." He groaned in pain as he attempted to move his left arm. "I'm alright boy." He grabbed the harness on the side of Steve's head. "Up. Help me up bud."

Steve lifted his head, and James held onto the harness as he did, lifting him up in the process.

He almost immediately fell to his knees again. His whole left side exploding in pain from the broken bones in his shoulder.

He looked around warily. He'd been sure that none of the things had been there before the call. But the wolf must have been waiting silently in ambush. He couldn't be sure there weren't more.

He looked down at his body, seeing the scratches that the wolf had caused on his legs and wincing at the blood there.

His armor was gone, and all that was left was the stuff from Earth. His boots, his pants, his shirt, and the belt and slings with his weapons and ammo. For some reason the bottomless bags had survived too.

Everything else had been vanished by the creature's attack.

His head snapped to Steve as he realized what that might mean.

He breathed a sigh of relief.

A portion of his saddle was gone. And Steve had had the equivalent of close shave underneath it. Some of the fur running down his back was missing, and James could see his scales underneath. But that was all.

He heard chattering coming from his ear piece, which had fallen out of his ear in the tumble. He placed it back in his ear as he looked around for his phone in the snow.

"CAPTAIN CHOI! ARE YOU THERE?" The General was asking over and over again.

He took a deep breath as he reached into the snow and grabbed his phone. He grunted as his left arm shifted. The phone's screen was flashing a moisture warning. He placed it into one of the bottomless bags. Then he pulled his rifle up.

His eyes continued to scan around him.

"Choi here." He said as he got back to Steve. "I'm.... alive."

"What happened?"

"Fuckin wolf thing knocked me off Steve." He replied. "I think. I think they can't vanish me like the others. Least not all the way."

"Say again. They can't vanish you?" The General asked.

"Either that, or they struggle to do so." He answered. "Lost all my Petravian gear that I was wearing. but my uniform gear and weapons were fine." He groaned as he lifted himself up onto Steve's back. The saddle was uncomfortable now. But it didn't really matter right now. "Damn thing fucked my shoulder up though."

He coughed and felt something move that wasn't supposed to move.

The General came back on the radio.

"Understood." He said. "Choi.... You've got a little over ten minutes to get the hell out of there."

"What happens in ten minutes?" James asked. "You said something about a fire mission. How the hell are you guys bringin in fire support?"

"We're launching a set of long range missiles through the doorway on our end." The General replied. "The King has some mages clearing a path at the castle."

"Oh. well." James said. "That's.... super fuckin badass." He began laughing hysterically and began to wonder just how bad he'd been hurt. "Awesome."

"Captain Choi." The General said, interrupting his continued laughter. "In roughly ten minutes that whole zone is gonna be turned into a red hot parking lot. Get you and yours out of there. Time now."

James took another deep breath. It hurt to do now. "Copy that. I'll keep you updated."

He looked back at the direction he'd come from. If Gixelle and Kela were still alive back there, then he had to hope that they'd heard that and could get any other survivors out.

Then he looked back towards where he could see Jadesport on the horizon.

Something moved into the small clearing from the left. Some kind of rabbit/deer hybrid.

James didn't give it the opportunity to prove whether it was blight possessed or just some random animal. His pistol cracked and he shot it in the head, dropping it immediately.

"Alright boy." He said to Steve's upturned head. "We need to go reeeeeeaaallly fast now."

He kicked the drake into motion and began riding as hard as he could.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/up02l6/wait_is_this_just_gate_147/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (146/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/unhsc2/wait_is_this_just_gate_145/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Little secret. I have very few things planned out in this series. At least when it comes to action sequences and what not. There's a few over-arching goals for the series, but that's about it. Often times I begin writing and I end up going down a narrative path that even makes me go "Huh, unexpected." Then I flesh it out.

Enjoy.

\~

It didn't take long for James to figure out the effect that his rounds were having.

After seeing the things ignore drake-fire, spells, rune stones, old school bombs, poisonous gas, and so much more, it became really noticeable that his rifle was still killing them. Even aiming it at the things was enough to make them stop in their tracks now, and they looked at it with, what he thought was, fear.

He didn't know why his rifle and, after a quick test, his pistol were so effective against the things. He didn't really care. It worked, and that was all that mattered.

He..... regretted.... roping Clan Drakrid into this.

He regretted coming here, and also mustering the forces he had in general.

This wasn't a battle any more. It hadn't been since those first few minutes, when the Blight Possessed had adapted to the attacks that had proven effective.

The great battle that they'd been planning, had turned into a slaughter.

And now that drakes, and even a handful of the flying mounts were beginning to emerge, albeit only from the largest of the blight patches, it was getting even more one sided.

He didn't know what was going on in Jadesport. He didn't know where Kela was. Or Gixelle. Or anyone for that matter.

He'd known that a dwarf on top of a long green drake had been riding with him on his left. Their drakes fire and the wave of acid that the dwarf could spray from his hands had claimed more than a few of the possessed. Then a large black boar had come rushing from the woods and tackled his drake, vanishing most of its torso in the process. It had taken the dwarf's legs too.

James had shot the boar creature in the head and torso several times. But he didn't stop riding. He couldn't. The creatures were everywhere. He heard the dwarf yelling out his drake's name as he rode. Then the yelling stopped.

Steve had lost part of his tail. James wasn't sure if the drake was even aware of it. According to Sigbert the damage to his arm hadn't hurt at all. James hoped that held true for Steve. James had shot the Possessed that had done it immediately and gotten Steve out of there.

Now he was alone.

He could hear what was left of the battle continuing around him. The whooshing noise that meant a drake was breathing death. The crackles and bangs of spells and various explosives. The yells of the riders and the screeching roars of their mounts as they struggled to survive. Somewhere nearby someone, a woman from the sound of the voice, was crying out a name and sobbing. Whether it was her bonded mount, or another rider she cared for, he didn't know.

This had been a mistake.

Once the Possessed had gotten into the midst of the formation, they'd had no choice but to break ranks. The drakes couldn't use their breath weapons if there was a chance of it hitting the riders around them. So they'd spread out to try and draw the creatures into separate formations and kill them that way. Once again it had only worked for a moment.

It hadn't been long after that that the formation had actually broken once and for all. The small groups of three to five riders had begun to fall apart and scatter until eventually there hadn't been any formation left. Just a bunch of Clan Drakrid members doing what they could to survive.

Some had stayed and fought. James suspected that he'd be seeing them again, as members of the Blight Possessed.

Others had run. He had a feeling that most of them would be okay, as long as they got away from the handful of flying possessed that now flew about.

James wasn't completely certain which of those groups he fell into. He was running. That was for sure. But he was still fighting and doing everything he could to kill any of the creatures he came across. Besides, he knew he wasn't running towards safety.

The fight here was over. All that was left was surviving, and maybe taking a few down when they finally caught you.

He was heading towards Jadesport.

\---

Vickers flinched back as a wave of fire burst from the new opening in the rock.

He looked on in disbelief as the fire hit the "Roylan" creature and seemed to disappear instantly, leaving them completely unharmed and not getting anywhere near Vickers as a result.

It was one thing to see footage or come across the aftermath of the thing's vanishing ability. It was another entirely to see it in action. He didn't wanna admit that he was thankful for it either. That flame WOULD have reached him if the creature hadn't been there.

As the fire cleared Vickers saw a massive creature standing on the other side.

Even from this distance he estimated that it had to be close to twelve feet tall. Its hands glowed with the familiar light of magic. It moved toward "Roylan" and attempted to grab him in its massive hands.

Vickers moved up, rifle still raised as he watched the large creature's arm disappear up to its elbow. It recoiled in shock and looked at its now missing limb.

Then it did something Vickers, and judging from its step back "Roylan" as well, hadn't expected.

It ripped the arm off at the bicep.

Vickers froze as he saw the display of self mutilation, and watched in awe as the creature casually tossed the detached limb aside.

Then a new one rapidly grew to replace it.

"Well." Vickers said to himself as he skidded to a halt. "That's a bit of a game changer."

He decided to keep his distance and kneeled down where he was.

"Who are you, that you would intrude upon this place." The creature asked in a voice so deep and gravelly that Vickers could barely understand it.

"I am a herald." The blight possessed answerede. "I have been sent to speak to your masters on behalf of my own."

Vickers' eyes furrowed at the suddenly smooth speaking style that "Roylan" had taken on out of nowhere. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought that the thing had been speaking its whole life. When, only a few minutes earlier, it had sounded like someone playing a series of disjointed soundbites from a recording.

"And who is your master? Why would they send you to us?" The large creature asked in return.

"I serve the cleansing. I have been sent to warn your masters that, if they have the ability, they should do whatever they can to get themselves and as many people as they care to take, off of this world." The possessed paused. "Specifically; out of this plane of existence."

The large creature leaned down, though it didn't make the mistake of getting too close, and peered into "Roylan's" face.

"And why is that?" It asked.

"Because..... The gods are done with this universe. They are wringing out the last few drops of entertainment and energy from it that they care to take." It made a motion with its hands that Vickers recognized as wringing out a towel. "Once that's done. The Cleansing will occur, and make room for a new world."

The large creatures eyes and ears glowed a dull red color for a moment and it tilted its head.

"Understood my lords." It said to itself as it looked back at the smaller creature in front of it. **"Consider your message delivered. Now leave."**

"Roylan" bowed awkwardly. Then began to head towards Vickers.

"Hold the fuck up!" Vickers yelled as he rose up and walked forward.

The large creature looked at him curiously, as though noticing him for the first time. It's eyes and ears glowed again.

"That's it?" Vickers asked. "That's all you came all this way for?"

"Roylan" Smiled the creepy smile he'd used before.

"I told you that I was simply a herald." It replied.

"No no no." Vickers replied. "You killed a lot of people back there." He pointed his rifle at the large creature that was still in the chamber. "And you! You're with the Agency. Right?"

The large creature didn't move or answer. But Vickers thought he saw anger appear on its face.

"Answer me." Vickers said.

"The people at the camp attacked me." The Blight Possessed replied. "And I didn't kill them. Not really. I simply.... sent them through."

Vickers' rifle switched back to "Roylan"

"Yeah. And what the fuck does that mean?" He asked.

"They are now like me." It replied. "And when the cleansing occurs. They will be available for the gods to seed the next world. Eventually."

"And I...." The large creature said before Vickers could say any more. **"Do not answer to you, interloper."**

POP!

Smoke curled from the end of Vicker's rifle as "Roylan" staggered backwards and fell against the wall. It was looking down at the small hole in its chest and jerked forward as if trying to rise up to its feet again. But the bullet had hit dead center, and its spine was shattered.

"Roylan" Raised his hands up and looked at Vickers with what, on a normal under control face, would have been anger. It was about to bring its hands forward, Vickers assumed to attack him with its power. He didn't let that happen.

POP!

Another round slammed into "Roylan's" left cheek bone and exploded that side of its head off.

The body fell to the ground and lay limp.

POP! POP! POP!

Three more rounds hit the thing in the neck, chest again, and pelvis in rapid succession.

The large creature simply looked at it curiously for a moment, its eyes and ears still glowing.

Vickers shifted his rifle back to aiming at it.

"You must be from the same place as the summoned hero." It said. **"Is this weapon one of these.... pistols?"**

Vickers didn't answer. Instead the two of them stared at each other for several long seconds.

Vickers gestured at the creature. "Your bosses are watchin' this. Aint they?" He asked.

The creature thought for a moment. Then it nodded.

Vickers lowered his weapon. As he did he also hit a button on his tablet that let the people up above know he'd found the location they'd been looking for.

"I'd like to speak with them." He said.

The creature looked at him with a hint of curiosity. Then the red glow dissipated from it's eyes and ears.

It stepped aside and gestured at a doorway inside the room. It reminded Vickers of the one that had been on the church his mom used to take him to when he was a kid. Only it wasn't attached to anything and seemed to be hovering just a few inches off the ground.

He walked forward slowly, hand still on the grip of his rifle. He kicked "Roylan" as he passed. The former herald didn't move at all.

So much for the boogeyman. He thought.

"Go through." The massive thing said as he walked past.

Vickers looked at the floating door. Then looked around at the room. There were other doors scattered about. None of them were floating like this one was. The room looked like it had just been cleaned. He could see scuff marks on the floor where there had once been furniture, and saw a few chairs off to the side.

He looked back up at the creature.

"No." He said simply. "They can come here. I aint goin through no weird fuckin door off to who the fuck knows where."

"No." It replied simply.

Vickers gripped his rifle a bit tighter, unsure as to what effect it would have against the massive, regenerative, seemingly armored creature. With his other hand he waved at the things face.

"Do the funky little glowy thing and talk to em. Tell em to send someone prettier over so we can chat. But I aint goin through no fuckin door." He said.

The creature stared at him. Then its eyes glowed again.

Vickers sat in one of the discarded chairs as he waited. He was startled at how comfortable it was for being made of, what he assumed was, stone.

\---------------------------

James hadn't heard any sign of battle for several minutes now as he rode. Even the last bit of commotion he had heard had been far away. So he jumped when his phone went off in his pocket. It was on silent, but the vibration had still caught him off guard. He'd forgotten that he even had the thing.

He scanned his surroundings, and after a moment of not seeing anything moving, lowered his rifle and pulled the phone out of his belt pouch.

His hands were trembling so bad that he almost dropped it. He pulled a a tab on his radio and an audio cord extended out from it. He plugged it into his phone's only port and sent the audio to his earpiece as he hit the green button.

"Yes sir?" He answered.

General Krick answered.

"Captain Choi you need to get out of there time now." He said in a raised and frantic voice.

"Already on it sir. This whole thing's gone to shit." He responded.

"We know. But we saw you heading southeast before we lost visual on you. Where the hell are you going?"

"Jadesport sir. I need to warn them. And help them if I can." He responded.

"Negative Choi. We've got a fire mission coming in on the blighted zone." The General said.

James stared at his phone in confusion.

What... the.... fuck? He wondered to himself.

"Um.... Sir?" He said. "Could you repeat that last? It sounded like you-"

The General cut him off.

"WE'VE GOT FIRE INCOMING CAPTAIN! WE'RE GONNA BOMB THE WHOLE DAMN BLIGHTED ZONE AND HOPE LIKE HELL THAT THEY HAVE THE SAME EFFECT THAT YOUR RIFLE AND PISTOL HAD!" He yelled into James's ear. "GET ANYONE NEARBY, AND EITHER GET THE HELL OUT, OR USE THAT MAGIC OF YOURS TO GET UNDERGROUND! DANGER CLOSE CAPTAIN!"

James stared at the phone again.

He was about to respond when something collided with his body.

The phone flew out of his hand, detaching from the cord and causing it to wind itself back up into the radio set.

James flew off of Steve's back, feeling some strange sensation that he'd never felt before. A kind of ripping, tearing, sucking sensation that effected every part of his body that had been impacted by whatever had hit him.

He hit the ground and was startled at how hard the impact was. Something slammed to the ground off to the side.

He rolled over onto his side, surprised to feel snow and dirt under his hands. He looked at his hands for just a split second.

"Where the fuck are my gauntlets?" He asked. Then he noticed that his arms were completely unarmored.

He raised himself up and was surprised to find that he was only wearing his green undershirt and his uniform pants. But all his armor was gone. Oddly, his bottomless bags were still strapped to his shoulder, though they felt hot on his back. His rifle was still slung too, though it was much looser without his armor on.

His head snapped up to whatever had impacted him.

It was a wolf, and one of its eyes was staring right at him.

Oh shit. He thought as it charged.

He was about to grab the rifle and raise it when a spout of fire, edged in black, burst forth and engulfed the creature.

He backed up, away from the heat.

Then he saw the wolf still charging.

No, it was leaping now.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (145/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/un23w1/wait_is_this_just_gate_144/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Putting out a new one while the previous is still on the front page. BALLIN! *^((JK)**)*

Anyways. Things always go a touch sideways in battle. ALWAYS.

Enjoy.

\~

James had thought he knew heat.

NTC had been hot in the day time. Though the site crew had told them that summer saw it get even hotter.

He'd thought that Steve's flame attack was hot. And in fairness, it was. He'd even seen it melt metal before during a couple of tests fires. No pun intended.

Plus he'd been around a few forges.

And of course there was the Elemental battle. That had taken the cake.

He had a feeling that a thermometer would put that event way higher up the temperature scale than what he was feeling now.

But he'd be damned if it was by very much.

When the Blight Possessed got within twenty yards, which they did quickly, the front line of drakes opened fire on them.

Fire of all kinds spewed forth in a massive torrent that James thought looked like a small tsunami. Steve's black edged fire was almost boring compared to the green tinge of Maxel, or the blues and purples of some of the other drakes. A white drake some yards away was spraying out lightning bolts that made Veliry's deathbolts look tame by comparison.

James watched as the first rank of the Blight Possessed, Bark-Soul included, were burned to ash and blown away by the uproar. He looked over and saw the sad, yet determined, look on Kela's face at the sight.

It had worked even better than James had hoped.

But his relief didn't last long.

By the time the second and third ranks of the creatures, the slower moving possessed, or the ones that were still learning how to use their bodies, they had adapted to the attacks. Flames, gases, lightning and other attacks parted around them like water breaking against a dock. And while the heat of the attacks was still causing some external damage to the possessed, it wasn't killing them, and they weren't acknowledging the damage either.

When she saw this Gixelle whistled and the flying riders began swooping in and attacking the enemy formation from behind as the ground formation moved back slowly.

Once again the Blight Possessed were caught off guard by the tactics, and James watched as they turned to look at their comrades being incinerated in the rear of their cluster.

James pulled his gator-neck up over his mouth and nose and doused it with some water from his canteen as the air began to fill with ash and smoke. Some of that ash was bound to be from the now incinerated former soldiers and researchers. The other riders did similarly.

The possessed adapted again. Too quickly, James thought.

"**PIT**!" James yelled as he charged the spell in his hands and brought them forward and then down. The other riders who could cast the spell moved up and did the same. It was a plan he'd told them about before they'd even left the castle. A move ripped straight from his fight with the elemental.

Suddenly a series of pits, of varying sizes and depths, opened up under the nearest of the creatures. They fell, with looks of confusion and anger on their faces as they realized what was happening. As soon as they did, riders had their drakes blast straight into the pits, sometimes three or four at a time.

Again, it only worked for a few attacks.

He saw a drake and its rider, some thirty yards to his left, suddenly fall out of sight with a yell as the ground underneath them opened and swallowed them whole.

No. It hadn't opened. Not like how their spells had opened it.

It had vanished.

The rider's yell cut off unexpectedly.

Another rider, to his right this time, began to fall. Their drake managed to grab onto the edge of the newly formed opening and scrambled to get back up. But James heard the rider cursing and saw a flash as they cast some kind of spell. Then they went silent, and the drake's eyes flared with bright light, then went limp.

James had just seen what happened when a bonded dragon-kin lost its rider.

Oh fuck. He thought.

He suddenly remembered one of Murphy's laws of combat; No plan ever survives first contact with the enemy. And he knew that that was kicking in now.

The Clan Drakrid formation erupted into chaos. Riders pulled back from the newly opened holes/tunnels into their ranks. More Blight Possesed began charging at them from the forest. Their breath attacks and flyers became less effective. The casters of the group, James included, began casting whatever spells they thought would be effective with varying levels of success.

James activated his throat mic.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (145/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/un22iu/wait_is_this_just_gate_144/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Putting out a new one while the previous is still on the front page. BALLIN! *^((JK)**)*

Anyways. Things always go a touch sideways in battle. ALWAYS.

Enjoy.

\~

James had thought he knew heat.

NTC had been hot in the day time. Though the site crew had told them that summer saw it get even hotter.

He'd thought that Steve's flame attack was hot. And in fairness, it was. He'd even seen it melt metal before during a couple of tests fires. No pun intended.

Plus he'd been around a few forges.

And of course there was the Elemental battle. That had taken the cake.

He had a feeling that a thermometer would put that event way higher up the temperature scale than what he was feeling now.

But he'd be damned if it was by very much.

When the Blight Possessed got within twenty yards, which they did quickly, the front line of drakes opened fire on them.

Fire of all kinds spewed forth in a massive torrent that James thought looked like a small tsunami. Steve's black edged fire was almost boring compared to the green tinge of Maxel, or the blues and purples of some of the other drakes. A white drake some yards away was spraying out lightning bolts that made Veliry's deathbolts look tame by comparison.

James watched as the first rank of the Blight Possessed, Bark-Soul included, were burned to ash and blown away by the uproar. He looked over and saw the sad, yet determined, look on Kela's face at the sight.

It had worked even better than James had hoped.

But his relief didn't last long.

By the time the second and third ranks of the creatures, the slower moving possessed, or the ones that were still learning how to use their bodies, had reached them, they had adapted to the attacks. Flames, gases, lightning and other attacks parted around them like water breaking against a dock. And while the heat of the attacks was still causing some external damage to the possessed, it wasn't killing them, and they weren't acknowledging the damage either.

When she saw this Gixelle whistled and the flying riders began swooping in and attacking the enemy formation from behind as the ground formation moved back slowly.

Once again the Blight Possessed were caught off guard by the tactics, and James watched as they turned to look at their comrades being incinerated in the rear of their cluster.

James pulled his gator-neck up over his mouth and nose and doused it with some water from his canteen as the air began to fill with ash and smoke. Some of that ash was bound to be from the now incinerated former soldiers and researchers. The other riders did similarly.

The possessed adapted again. Too quickly, James thought.

"**PIT**!" James yelled as he charged the spell in his hands and brought them forward and then down. The other riders who could cast the spell moved up and did the same. It was a plan he'd told them about before they'd even left the castle. A move ripped straight from his fight with the elemental.

Suddenly a series of pits, of varying sizes and depths, opened up under the nearest of the creatures. They fell, with looks of confusion and anger on their faces as they realized what was happening. As soon as they did, riders had their drakes blast straight into the pits, sometimes three or four at a time.

Again, it only worked for a few attacks.

He saw a drake and its rider, some thirty yards to his left, suddenly fall out of sight with a yell as the ground underneath them opened and swallowed them whole.

No. It hadn't opened. Not like how their spells had opened it.

It had vanished.

The rider's yell cut off unexpectedly.

Another rider, to his right this time, began to fall. Their drake managed to grab onto the edge of the newly formed opening and scrambled to get back up. But James heard the rider cursing and saw a flash as they cast some kind of spell. Then they went silent, and the drake's eyes flared with bright light, then went limp.

James had just seen what happened when a bonded dragon-kin lost its rider.

Oh fuck. He thought.

He suddenly remembered one of Murphy's laws of combat; No plan ever survives first contact with the enemy. And he knew that that was kicking in now.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (144/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/um188g/wait_is_this_just_gate_143/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: BIG!!!!! C.G.I.!!!!! ACTION SEQUENCE!!!!!

LET'S GET IT ON!!!!

PS: Sorry I'm a touch late. Passed the last of my NREMT Recerts today, so I was a touch busy.

\~

James sat atop Steve on a hill top overlooking the remnants of Sigbert's camp. Gixelle sat atop Maxel off to his left. Kela sat on a horse to his right. The rest of the clan Drakrid riders milled about behind him on their mounts, some of them flew about above.

Amina, Alixan, and Veliry had ridden wide around the affected area and were helping muster the Royal Army forces they'd brought with them to reinforce Jadesport and anyone who'd survived the camp attack. More were on their way behind them on foot.

After hearing what was happening at the castle Gixelle had fired off her summoning device in the castle courtyard, summoning all available Clan Drakrid members throughout the continent. It had taken another few days for them all too arrive, and James had seen how the wyverns, dragons, and wyrms had actually carried some of the drake and other grounded riders. Gixelle had used the time to go over the drafted agreement with the king, hiring the Clan as an auxilliary force until the current threat had been dealt with.

Gixelle had given a rousing, and at times curse laden and crude, speech to the Drakrid members. By the time she was done the ragtag group of what had essentially become mercenaries were practically rabid. James took a bunch of mental notes on how she'd done that.

That had been four days ago. Once the last handful of dragon-kin riders had arrived Gixelle had told them that they were going to hot-hop to the camp. The grounded riders had all groaned, but begun heading out to where they'd tied up their mounts. James had wondered what that meant.

It had meant flying.

On top of Steve.

Who did not like being carried by the large blue dragon that had lifted him off the ground like a bird of prey carrying a fish, albeit minus the claws sinking into his flanks.

It had sped up the trip. But James had basically spent each of the one to two hundred mile stretches doing everything he could to keep Steve from lashing out or breathing fire.

Now they were here, and James wished that he'd stayed in the sky with Steve.

"We ready?" He asked Gixelle.

"Fuck no." She said. "That place is creeping me out. But there's nothing else to do. Is there?"

James looked at the abandoned, destroyed, partially vanished, camp below them.

"I don't think so." He replied. "Let's get it over with." He said as he kicked Steve into motion.

Gixelle nodded and waved everyone forward.

The flying riders slowly began weaving forward in a large back and forth zig-zag pattern. They were the overwatch detail, keeping eyes open for anything unexpected. Some of them had been sent to help Amina with the city forces. They'd all been shown footage of the blight and told that it would be difficult to see them. But they knew about the airborne blight patches and so knew to avoid them by any means necessary.

James, Gixelle, and the other grounded forces began moving in slowly.

The air shimmered with the warmth of the drakes on the outer edges of the group, and there was a low rumble reverberating through the area. The snow around them melted as they passed, resulting in a muddy, slushy, slurry under their feet.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (144/?)

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Writer's note: BIG!!!!! C.G.I.!!!!! ACTION SEQUENCE!!!!!

LET'S GET IT ON!!!!

PS: Sorry I'm a touch late. Passed the last of my NREMT Recerts today, so I was a touch busy.

\~

James sat atop Steve on a hill top overlooking the remnants of Sigbert's camp. Gixelle sat atop Maxel off to his left. Kela sat on a horse to his right. The rest of the clan Drakrid riders milled about behind him on their mounts, some of them flew about above.

Amina, Alixan, and Veliry had ridden wide around the affected area and were helping muster the Royal Army forces they'd brought with them to reinforce Jadesport and anyone who'd survived the camp attack. More were on their way behind them on foot.

After hearing what was happening at the castle Gixelle had fired off her summoning device in the castle courtyard, summoning all available Clan Drakrid members throughout the continent. It had taken another few days for them all too arrive, and James had seen how the wyverns, dragons, and wyrms had actually carried some of the drake and other grounded riders. Gixelle had used the time to go over the drafted agreement with the king, hiring the Clan as an auxilliary force until the current threat had been dealt with.

Gixelle had given a rousing, and at times curse laden and crude, speech to the Drakrid members. By the time she was done the ragtag group of what had essentially become mercenaries were practically rabid. James took a bunch of mental notes on how she'd done that.

That had been four days ago. Once the last handful of dragon-kin riders had arrived Gixelle had told them that they were going to hot-hop to the camp. The grounded riders had all groaned, but begun heading out to where they'd tied up their mounts. James had wondered what that meant.

It had meant flying.

On top of Steve.

Who did not like being carried by the large blue dragon that had lifted him off the ground like a bird of prey carrying a fish, albeit minus the claws sinking into his flanks.

It had sped up the trip. But James had basically spent each of the one to two hundred mile stretches doing everything he could to keep Steve from lashing out or breathing fire.

Now they were here, and James wished that he'd stayed in the sky with Steve.

"We ready?" He asked Gixelle.

"Fuck no." She said. "That place is creeping me out. But there's nothing else to do. Is there?"

James looked at the abandoned, destroyed, partially vanished, camp below them.

"I don't think so." He replied. "Let's get it over with." He said as he kicked Steve into motion.

Gixelle nodded and waved everyone forward.

The flying riders slowly began weaving forward in a large back and forth zig-zag pattern. They were the overwatch detail, keeping eyes open for anything unexpected. Some of them had been sent to help Amina with the city forces. They'd all been shown footage of the blight and told that it would be difficult to see them. But they knew about the airborne blight patches and so knew to avoid them by any means necessary.

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[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/uk0eao/wait_is_this_just_gate_142/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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The footage showed the opening moments of the one sided battle. Showed the soldiers being attacked and disappeared.

"Like I said. They... vanish... the people they attack." He reiterated. The murmuring had turned into outright arguing and chatter.

He used his phone to move the footage forward. The new clip showed a different, later, part of the fight. It showed a band of the camp soldiers attempting to flee with some of the non-military camp members. Several of the mages from the research group were there. One of them launched a blast of what James assumed was icy wind at the attacking creatures. Several of them were caught in the blast. The closest two began to freeze. The third one began to freeze, but then the ice attack seemed to part around its horse body.

"See? Area effects seem to work, even if only temporarily. And Magic damages them like anyone else." James said. "And we all have magic-infused, flame spitting, monsters as our mounts. A lot of which can even fly."

But they weren't listening anymore. They were too busy discussing the footage. A few of the riders began to walk out.

Amina's voice startled him.

"LISTEN UP!"

James jumped at the volume of the yell. It wasn't a volume that a normal human voice should have been capable of. But when James looked at her he saw the tell tale glow of magic fading from her throat. The riders had all frozen in place or ducked down from the outburst.

"You have been summoned to the aide of a member of your clan." Amina said. "You are beholden by clan law to at least hear him out. Captain Choi was summoned via the God's Door specifically to help deal with the blight." She was standing next to James now, who was staring at the riders with a raised eyebrow. He was just trying to imitate the Company Commander from basic training when they'd given the entire company an ass chewing for something. "Our arch mages, the members of the druidic enclave have agreed, and the Moon Mages of the werewolf packlands, have all agreed. The Vanishing Blight is a threat to our entire world. So the King has already begun drafting an agreement with your clan leader to mobilize you. Soon as she gets here we'll be discussing it."

As if on cue, the doors to the side of the room slammed open. Gixelle rushed into the room, hand on her sword.

"I got here as fast as I could!" She exclaimed.

She stopped when she saw James and Amina standing in front of the crowd of riders.

"Is this..... not the situation you warned me of before?" She asked James.

"Uh..... No?" He said with a light shake of his head. He'd kind of forgotten that conversation until she mentioned it. "But it might be just as bad."

"What's happening?" She asked. She turned to the crowd. "And why do you all look like I just caught you with your hand on a griffin's egg?"

The riders all shifted uncomfortably.

James ushered her over to show her the footage.

"We got problems." He said simply as she walked forward.

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Vickers looked at the intersection warily.

It was the first time the tunnel he'd been walking down had met another set of tunnels. But the others had already warned him about the so called "Deep Dark" and how it spread across the planet, even under the oceans. He knew he'd be coming across more of these intersections as he went further and deeper into the chase.

There was a dead creature here. His glasses showed it to him in a dull black and green display that was startlingly clear.

It was fuckin' ugly. The creature he was tailing must have killed it. He was thankful that the thing's power didn't cause any mess. The dead creature smelled bad enough as it was. He didn't want to imagine what its guts smelled like.

He almost wondered if the creature had taken either of the side tunnels. He cycled through his glasses displays to see if there was anything to notice. But they were just tunnels.

But the way the tunnel ahead of him was formed was identical to the path he'd been traveling on. Flat on the floor, eerily smooth down the sides. There were tunnels back on earth that had been built by construction equipment and engineering degrees that weren't as smooth as this tunnel was. The other two tunnels were clearly naturally formed, jagged and random.

"I feel as though I may be overqualified for this." Vickers whispered to himself.

He regretted the slip in judgment almost immediately as he heard something clicking down the tunnel to the left. He'd let his long lasting sensory deprivation and boredom get the best of him. And now something had heard him.

He clicked the safety off of his pistol and drew his shield from his back, pulling the leather cover off of it as he did.

Something skittered further down the tunnel.

He turned so that he could look down the tunnel, but also had his back turned to the tunnel that It had created. At least he knew there was nothing down there. Then he crouched.

And waited.

When the creature, as well as a horde of friends, came around the next bend in their tunnel Vickers went to work.

"Goddam y'all are fuck ugly." He said before there was a flare of light and a loud snapping noise.

The first one fell as it was running.

The rest weren't far behind.

He was right. They smelled even worse when they made a mess. And even worse than that when his shield sent them flying away and on fire.

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"Roylan" heard the commotion behind It.

It sensed the large cluster of lifeforms moving almost as a single mass towards the other "Outsider" that was following It.

Then It felt the other mass of life forms diminish as they were killed, eventually withering down until the last few ran away.

The Outsider was still there. It pondered this for a moment. Roylan's knowledge had already told It that this part of the world was incredibly dangerous. If this Outsider could hold their own here than they were formidable enough.

It would need to be wary of this Outsider. There was no knowing what effect a creature from Outside might have on It. Those two factors made it one of the few things that might actually be a threat.

But It would deal with them whenever they caught up.

It estimated that It only had a few more days before it got to It's goal.

So It continued forward.

\----------

In a deep, dark, room. Well below the deepest of the deep dark's normal chambers. A series of glowing runes lit up as a warning.

Doors had been opening and closing rapidly over the past few days.

Notes had been exchanged rapidly.

Something was heading towards their Petravian operation center. And it was doing so directly.

Some kind of battle was occurring near the Blight Patch on the surface. Numerous agents had been lost as a result of this. Not even their souls had reported any information, which wasn't a good sign.

And the Summoned Hero had launched his Clan Flare. He was gathering Clan Drakrid to ride to war.

Numerous plans and contracts were cancelled or at the very least postponed as they called in operatives to gather information.

The Petravian site was cleared of all intel and artifacts.

Only a single door was left active, the other eight were sealed and concealed.

They would meet this intruder. But on their own terms.

And if they had to, they would deal with the Hero as well.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/un23w1/wait_is_this_just_gate_144/)

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James moved out of the way to let them see it without his body blocking some.

"This is what we call footage." James informed them. "They're moving pictures. We recorded them just last night."

The footage showed the opening moments of the one sided battle. Showed the soldiers being attacked and disappeared.

"Like I said. They... vanish... the people they attack." He reiterated. The murmuring had turned into outright arguing and chatter.

He used his phone to move the footage forward. The new clip showed a different, later, part of the fight. It showed a band of the camp soldiers attempting to flee with some of the non-military camp members. Several of the mages from the research group were there. One of them launched a blast of what James assumed was icy wind at the attacking creatures. Several of them were caught in the blast. The closest two began to freeze. The third one began to freeze, but then the ice attack seemed to part around its horse body.

"See? Area effects seem to work, even if only temporarily. And Magic damages them like anyone else." James said. "And we all have magic-infused, flame spitting, monsters as our mounts. A lot of which can even fly."

But they weren't listening anymore. They were too busy discussing the footage. A few of the riders began to walk out.

Amina's voice startled him.

"LISTEN UP!"

James jumped at the volume of the yell. It wasn't a volume that a normal human voice should have been capable of. But when James looked at her he saw the tell tale glow of magic fading from her throat. The riders had all frozen in place or ducked down from the outburst.

"You have been summoned to the aide of a member of your clan." Amina said. "You are beholden by clan law to at least hear him out. Captain Choi was summoned via the God's Door specifically to help deal with the blight." She was standing next to James now, who was staring at the riders with a raised eyebrow. He was just trying to imitate the Company Commander from basic training when they'd given the entire company an ass chewing for something. "Our arch mages, the members of the druidic enclave have agreed, and the Moon Mages of the werewolf packlands, have all agreed. The Vanishing Blight is a threat to our entire world. So the

King has already begun drafting an agreement with your clan leader to mobilize you. Soon as she gets here we'll be discussing it."

As if on cue, the doors to the side of the room slammed open. Gixelle rushed into the room, hand on her sword.

"I got here as fast as I could!" She exclaimed.

She stopped when she saw James and Amina standing in front of the crowd of riders.

"Is this..... not the situation you warned me of before?" She asked James.

"Uh..... No?" He said with a light shake of his head. He'd kind of forgotten that conversation until she mentioned it. "But it might be just as bad."

"What's happening?" She asked. She turned to the crowd. "And why do you all look like I just caught you with your hand on a griffin's egg?"

The riders all shifted uncomfortably.

James ushered her over to show her the footage.

"We got problems." He said simply as she walked forward.

\-------------------------

Vickers looked at the intersection warily.

It was the first time the tunnel he'd been walking down had met another set of tunnels. But the others had already warned him about the so called "Deep Dark" and how it spread across the planet, even under the oceans. He knew he'd be coming across more of these intersections as he went further and deeper into the chase.

There was a dead creature here. His glasses showed it to him in a dull black and green display that was startlingly clear.

It was fuckin' ugly. The creature he was tailing must have killed it. He was thankful that the thing's power didn't cause any mess. The dead creature smelled bad enough as it was. He didn't want to imagine what its guts smelled like.

He almost wondered if the creature had taken either of the side tunnels. He cycled through his glasses displays to see if there was anything to notice. But they were just tunnels.

But the way the tunnel ahead of him was formed was identical to the path he'd been traveling on. Flat on the floor, eerily smooth down the sides. There were tunnels back on earth that had been built by construction equipment and engineering degrees that weren't as smooth as this tunnel

was. The other two tunnels were clearly naturally formed, jagged and random.

"I feel as though I may be overqualified for this." Vickers whispered to himself.

He regretted the slip in judgment almost immediately as he heard something clicking down the tunnel to the left. He'd let his long lasting sensory deprivation and boredom get the best of him. And now something had heard him.

He clicked the safety off of his pistol and drew his shield from his back, pulling the leather cover off of it as he did.

Something skittered further down the tunnel.

He turned so that he could look down the tunnel, but also had his back turned to the tunnel that It had created. At least he knew there was nothing down there. Then he crouched.

And waited.

When the creature, as well as a horde of friends, came around the next bend in their tunnel Vickers went to work.

"Goddam y'all are fuck ugly." He said before there was a flare of light and a loud snapping noise.

The first one fell as it was running.

The rest weren't far behind.

He was right. They smelled even worse when they made a mess. And even worse than that when his shield sent them flying away and on fire.

\----------

"Roylan" heard the commotion behind It.

It sensed the large cluster of lifeforms moving almost as a single mass towards the other "Outsider" that was following It.

Then It felt the other mass of life forms diminish as they were killed, eventually withering down until the last few ran away.

The Outsider was still there. It pondered this for a moment. Roylan's knowledge had already told It that this part of the world was incredibly dangerous. If this Outsider could hold their own here than they were formidable enough.

It would need to be wary of this Outsider. There was no knowing what effect a creature from Outside might have on It. Those two factors made it one of the few things that might actually be a threat.

But It would deal with them whenever they caught up.

It estimated that It only had a few more days before it got to It's goal.

So It continued forward.

\--------------------------------

In a deep, dark, room. Well below the deepest of the deep dark's normal chambers. A series of glowing runes lit up as a warning.

Doors had been opening and closing rapidly over the past few days.

Notes had been exchanged rapidly.

Something was heading towards their Petravian operation center. And it was doing so directly.

Some kind of battle was occurring near the Blight Patch on the surface. Numerous agents had been lost as a result of this. Not even their souls had reported any information, which wasn't a good sign.

And the Summoned Hero had launched his Clan Flare. He was gathering Clan Drakrid to ride to war.

Numerous plans and contracts were cancelled or at the very least postponed as they called in operatives to gather information.

The Petravian site was cleared of all intel and artifacts.

Only a single door was left active, the other eight were sealed and concealed.

They would meet this intruder. But on their own terms.

And if they had to, they would deal with the Hero as well.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/un22iu/wait_is_this_just_gate_144/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (142/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/uj82tl/wait_is_this_just_gate_141/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Gondor calls for aid?

But seriously, this is a short one. Things get hectic in the next few chapters. Helluva cliffhanger to leave you on over the weekend. Enjoy

\~

Kela's ears perked up at the sound of the approaching rider.

She smelled the adrenaline and sweat on them, the faint trace of urine.

She smelled genuine fear.

Several of the other guards helped them off of their horse as they got to the camp. Kela walked over from where she'd been overseeing the soldiers working on the tunnel. Sigbert emerged from his tent at the sound of the commotion.

"General!" The young man, barely even an adult, cried out. "General there's been an attack back at main camp!" The man said as he pushed his way past the other guards.

Kela got to him first.

"What's going on?" She asked. "What do you mean there's been an attack? Who's attacking?"

"I don't know." Said the young man. "They were, Gods they were everywhere. They were everything!" He was on the verge of tears. "Me and Milo were on patrol when the lanterns started bobbing! We rushed over to give backup. Then something landed near us. Near one of the blobs of blight."

Kela grabbed the young soldier under the arm as he sagged. He was shaking as he fought back sobs.

"We turned to see what it was. It was just a dog. Some random mongrel from somewhere. Layin' in the snow." He said as he grasped at Kela's arms. "Then it made this noise. We went closer to it to see what was wrong wif it. Then it.... it spoke!"

"What?" Sigbert asked from behind her. "What do you mean it spoke?"

The soldier, by the gods he couldn't have been more than seventeen Kela realized, looked at the General.

"It said 'Help Roylan'!" He said.

Kela looked at Sigbert and saw fear as deep as this boys was on his face. She knew from battles she'd been in under the man that he was a deadly warrior, and had never seen such unfiltered panic on him before.

"Then..." The boy continued. "Another one popped out of the same patch. A hurox this time. It said the same thing. Milo... he.... he went up to look at the dog and it jumped at him." He grabbed onto Kela's arm. "Then he just dissapeared. It was like that thing. It wasn't a dog anymore. It was like it had.... I don't know, eaten him. But not wif no mess. He was just gone."

Kela lowered the soldier back to the ground and left him there as he began to sob again.

"I ran." He said as she began walking towards the table where she'd put her radio. "They both looked right at me and sayd it again. So I just.... I ran."

Sigbert was frozen in place staring at the young soldier.

When she got to the table she picked the radio up and depressed the button on the side, it was easier than fiddling with the throat mic.

"James. Vickers. Are you there?" She said into the receiver. "This is Kela. James if you're there let me know. If not than either of you two guards go get him and the General now. Vickers. Do you hear me?"

"Yeah. I'm here." Vickers replied in a whisper, she turned her volume up. "What's up?"

"There's something happening with the Vanishing Blight. Some kind of invasion back at the main observation camp." She informed him.

"What do you want me to do about it?" He asked. "I've gotta be at least twenty miles deep by now, if not more. Smells like moldy ass in here."

"Bet you eat a lot of that back home." She countered. "I'm not asking you to do anything. I'm just telling you what's happening. I'm going to go check it out and see if there's anything I can do to help. But I doubt there is. Just know that there's a chance you might be on your own for a bit. But we can't know for sure if they're going to try to head towards the same place."

"Understood." He said simply. "I'll stay on my toes."

"Alright. Stay off the line for a bit. I'm gonna try to talk to James. Let me know if anything changes in there."

"Roger." He said. She'd always wondered how someone's name had become a phrase of acceptance in James's military. But this wasn't the time or place.

Several minutes later James got on the radio too. During the wait she pulled out her tablet and checked the drone feed from the few she'd stationed at the main camp.

It wasn't good. There was an incredibly one sided battle and retreat occurring there. The mages that had been on site to study the affected area seemed to be the only ones having any effect on the myriad creatures attacking. Though, ultimately, they only seemed to be inconveniencing the creatures.

Even more troubling. The drone that was watching the perimeter of the camp and facing toward the blight showed more of the creatures popping out of the patches of blight that it could see in its frame. These ones

weren't struggling to stand up or move the way "Roylan" had when he'd first emerged.

And some of them were people.

They were soldiers.

"Kela. What's going on?" He asked.

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"Kela. Get as many people out of there as possible." She said. "Send word to Jadesport. Have them call in as many ships as possible to the port. Prep them for an evacuation to see if necessary, but put their garrison on alert."

"Got it." Kela responded.

"Kela." James spoke this time. "We're on our way. We're gonna bring everything."

Kela only said one word in response.

"Hurry."

\----------

Amina ran out of the communication room towards the war room.

"Sound the alarm! Muster everyone!" She shouted as she ran down the hall.

James typed up a message as quickly as he could on the communication hub then hit the send button and ran back to his room.

"Where is it?" He asked himself as he rummaged through his gear. "Come on. Where is it?"

It took another few minutes. But he found it. *Of course.* He thought. *Why wouldn't it be in the saddle bag. It's just the most important thing I have related to Clan Drakrid.*

The second he found it he sprinted through the room and burst through the door to Amina's balcony, slamming into the railing outside as he slid into it.

"Oh I hope this counts as the kind of situation that you use this for." He said to himself as he aimed the small device into the air. He pulled the tab on the back and there was a loud pop.

A bright flare of smoky purple light launched into the sky, screaming so loudly that it made James's ears ring after it was over.

Huh. It's a fucking flare gun. He thought. *Fuck. My ears hurt now.*

But the important thing, was that he'd officially summoned Clan Drakrid.

He ran back into the room and began putting on his armor and winter overcoat. Amina returned a few minutes later and began to do the same.

James's time of not knowing what to do about the Vanishing Blight was at an end.

It was time to improvise.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/um188g/wait_is_this_just_gate_143/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (142/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/uj80hf/wait_is_this_just_gate_141/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Just a reminder that r/GATEhouse *is a thing now. Check it out.*

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/um169x/wait_is_this_just_gate_143/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (141/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/uihrs6/wait_is_this_just_gate_140/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: They're heeeeeeeeeere.

Enjoy!

\~

The air was dank and cold, and it smelled of loose dirt and a slight scent of sulfur.

It began to think.... that wasn't new. But It began to think of itself as.... itself as it was walking forward and downward.

Roylan was gone. His mind existed only as an organ within a body that functioned only by the barest of definitions. Its neurons didn't fire, and would never fire. It accessed the memories and knowledge that Roylan had accumulated the way a normal person might read a book, or assess a painted image.

In spite of this, it began to think of itself as something separate. Someone separate.

It became aware of others. Others besides Itself.

They weren't nearby. They were back. Back the way It had come from.

They would join It in It's objective. But not this exact objective. Theirs would be different. But aligned.

What was interesting to It. What caused It to pause for just a moment and reach out with It's senses, was the presence of ANOTHER somewhere behind it.

This one was different.

For starters, they didn't have the same..... energy.... that other entities in this world seemed to possess. Or if they did, it wasn't much of it.

But also It could sense that this entity wasn't FROM this world.

The approaching entity was like It was.

An outsider.

And it knew, somehow, that this other outsider's objective was to prevent It from accomplishing It's own.

That just wouldn't do.

But It also knew that it COULDN'T be stopped by anything on this world.

So, after a moments...... thought..... It continued forward.

A few yards after noticing this approaching presence It accidentally crossed paths with another tunnel. A small group of creatures, pale

skinned and eyeless froze in the middle of doing something. Then one of them tried to attack, their jaw opening wide to reveal a set of razor sharp fangs. Its head dissapeared as soon as it touched It's leg. The body spasmed and then fell to the floor of the cave tunnel.

It stepped on the body as it continued walking. The body didn't squelch or pop or squish, it simply dissapeared, just like the head had.

Another of the pale creatures, this one much larger and sporting a line of light fur down its back attempted to attack next, letting out a screech as it did, and met a similar fate.

The rest broke and ran after that. Leaving It alone as It continued moving, and eliminating the stone as it neared it.

But It sensed..... others.... moving toward it with curiosity from the newly uncovered tunnel.

\----------

"Alright Kela." James said into the main radio hub back at the capital. "How are things at the blight camp?"

He'd gotten message from one of the castle guards that Kela had sent a message back on the radio, indicating that they'd finally made it to Sigbert's location and set up some of the signal extending relay spikes. He'd rushed to the room that now had the communication hub and the main radio console that had been sent over. Amina was already waiting for him and looking at the radio curiously when he'd gotten there.

There was a light clicking noise as Kela fumbled with her throat mic, which hadn't fit her massive werewolf throat correctly in the first place.

"James? Gods, this is-" She cut off for a moment. "Get this working. James. Can you hear me?" She asked.

"Yeah." He replied. "You're kinda cutting in and out though."

A moment passed as the signal traveled the several hundred miles through the relays.

"Ah. Good. It's just this stupid necklace device. I keep having to readjust it." She said.

"Got it. How's setup going? And what's the word with the blight creature?" He asked.

Another moment's wait.

"Good. We've got several of the spikes set up around the entrance to the tunnel, and I've set a few more along the way to the main camp. I've also deployed several of the drones in case you want to use the other hub." She replied.

"That's good. What tunnel? What's going on?"

"The creature. Vickers named it a 'Blight Possessed' it came upon a cliff wall that was blocking its path. It simply kept going forward and using its.... disappearing power.... to tunnel through it." She said. "And it seems to be sloping downward, so we think it might be getting close to wherever it's headed. At Vickers' request, we're shoring up the tunnel even now. I set one of the drones so it would keep an eye on it if you want to look."

"Okay. Give me one second. I'll see what we've got." He replied.

"Drone twenty eight Ex?" She informed him using her tablet's phonetic pronunciation of the letter X, which didn't exist in the Petravian language.

James went over to the communication hub and pulled up the drone surveillance controls.

Blight possessed? He thought. *Gotta hand it to Vickers on that one. It's a good name, if it ends up being accurate.*

After a moment's looking he found the drone feed in question and saw a night vision image of the newly made tunnel. He also saw the soldiers currently hauling in wood and supplies as they worked to reinforce it and prevent a collapse. The resolution wasn't good, since the drone was both on a delay, and in low power mode. But it was clear enough.

He went back to the radio.

"Alright. I see it." He said. "What's Vickers' assessment? When's he heading in?"

"I suggested that we head in at first light." She replied. "But he insisted on going in immediately. So he's already been moving for the past hour or so. Myself and a few other soldiers who can handle the dark are going in tomorrow."

James rubbed his forehead in mild frustration at the news. Of course he'd done that. The guy was an asshole.

Why do I suddenly sympathize with the Colonel all of a sudden? He thought as he took a deep breath.

"Okay." He said instead. "Well. You've ridden hard. Get some rest before you head in. Keep us updated if anything changes or if you need any help."

"Will do." She replied. "I'll message you whenever we're about to move."

"Choi out." He said as he set the handset down.

"Uhhh. Okay." She replied awkwardly.

He ignored the confusion and walked back to his and Amina's room. It was late and his arm and hands still ached from the injuries he'd gotten the day before. The glowing green bandages reminding him of his miscalculation. Amina kissed him on the cheek before assuring him that she'd be in bed soon before she turned and headed back to the war room.

Once Amina was around the corner and he'd looked to make sure nobody else was around, James began to focus.

As he did, he slowly pulled his arm from its sling. It hurt, but he'd be okay for a quick test.

He felt the energy begin pooling in his head and eyes.

He wanted to become better with this new spell, even if it might mean a bit of trial and error. He had a feeling that it would come in handy soon.

James held his good arm up and put his hand near his face, smiling as he saw how slowly it moved, and smiling wider as he saw it reflecting orange light once it was only a few inches away.

Keeping the spell active, James got into a racer's stance, as if he was about to run a one hundred meter dash.

Then he began to sprint to the room.

\----------

Traya trudged across the packed snow surrounding the blight lands with her shoulders hunched. It was cold, and even worse it was windy. She hugged used her shield hand to keep her cloak pulled tight as she walked her patrol route. The shield helped block the wind a bit, but not by much, and it weighted a ton over the course of a four hour patrol.

It was horse shit that they had to increase the patrol and guard duties so much. Especially with how many people had been taken out by this so called "blight creature" that had attacked. She didn't believe any of it.

Roylan had been a drunk ass his entire career. And everyone knew it. She'd been almost happy to hear that he'd gone missing.

She knew that he'd probably just gone on a rampage when he'd been caught. Had likely seen no way to avoid the dungeons for deserting his post. Hell, she would in his position.

The only thing that made it odd was how the General had lost a hand.

Roylan might've been a good brawler, most drunks were, and he was alright with a sword. But the General? There was no way he'd beat the General in a fight. Not even close.

These thoughts, and the cold, were what was on Traya's mind and distracted her from the noise of something thumping on the ground.

Still her senses, honed by years as a city guard before this assignment, told her something had changed, and that she needed to listen.

She froze in her tracks and silenced herself as much as she could in the wind.

There was a long, exaggerated, crunch. As if something was moving in the snow, but not by footsteps. Some different kind of movement.

She covered the front of her lantern, hooding it with part of her cloak to smother it. She would need to be able to see, and the light prevented that past a few yards.

Something thumped, as if via impact, off to her right. It had to be at least ten yards away, but it was also heavy whatever it was. She looked to her left and saw one of the other guards on the same path waving their lantern in question.

She uncovered her lantern again and raised it up and down twice. The signal to bring back up.

Then she covered it again and began walking forward, shield up and axe in hand.

There was that sliding crunching sound again. Something rattled.

"If anyone's there!" She yelled. "Speak now and reveal yourself! Or else I'll be on you!"

A low, rumbling, raspy voice tried to say something.

"Hhhhhh." It said.

She turned toward the noise. "Speak!" She yelled.

"HHHHEeeeelpth..... RRrroooyling." It said in an incredibly wet sounding rumble.

She charged forward, expecting to find Roylan, who'd somehow escaped before.

It wasn't Roylan.

"What in the hells?" She asked as she saw it.

She heard pounding, crunching footsteps behind her and turned to look. Though she kept the creature in front of her in the corner of her eye.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (141/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: They're heeeeeeeeeere.

Enjoy!

\~

The air was dank and cold, and it smelled of loose dirt and a slight scent of sulfur.

It began to think.... that wasn't new. But It began to think of itself as.... itself as it was walking forward and downward.

Roylan was gone. His mind existed only as an organ within a body that functioned only by the barest of definitions. Its neurons didn't fire, and would never fire. It accessed the memories and knowledge that Roylan had accumulated the way a normal person might read a book, or assess a painted image.

In spite of this, it began to think of itself as something separate. Someone separate.

It became aware of others. Others besides Itself.

They weren't nearby. They were back. Back the way It had come from.

They would join It in It's objective. But not this exact objective. Theirs would be different. But aligned.

What was interesting to It. What caused It to pause for just a moment and reach out with It's senses, was the presence of ANOTHER somewhere behind it.

This one was different.

For starters, they didn't have the same..... energy.... that other entities in this world seemed to possess. Or if they did, it wasn't much of it.

But also It could sense that this entity wasn't FROM this world.

The approaching entity was like It was.

An outsider.

And it knew, somehow, that this other outsider's objective was to prevent It from accomplishing It's own.

That just wouldn't do.

But It also knew that it COULDN'T be stopped by anything on this world.

So, after a moments..... thought..... It continued forward.

A few yards after noticing this approaching presence It accidentally crossed paths with another tunnel. A small group of creatures, pale skinned and eyeless froze in the middle of doing something. Then one of them tried to attack, their jaw opening wide to reveal a set of razor sharp fangs. Its head dissapeared as soon as it touched It's leg. The body spasmed and then fell to the floor of the cave tunnel.

It stepped on the body as it continued walking. The body didn't squelch or pop or squish, it simply dissapeared, just like the head had.

Another of the pale creatures, this one much larger and sporting a line of light fur down its back attempted to attack next, letting out a screech as it did, and met a similar fate.

The rest broke and ran after that. Leaving It alone as It continued moving, and eliminating the stone as it neared it.

But It sensed..... others.... moving toward it with curiosity from the newly uncovered tunnel.

\----------

"Alright Kela." James said into the main radio hub back at the capital. "How are things at the blight camp?"

He'd gotten message from one of the castle guards that Kela had sent a message back on the radio, indicating that they'd finally made it to Sigbert's location and set up some of the signal extending relay spikes. He'd rushed to the room that now had the communication hub and the main radio console that had been sent over. Amina was already waiting for him and looking at the radio curiously when he'd gotten there.

There was a light clicking noise as Kela fumbled with her throat mic, which hadn't fit her massive werewolf throat correctly in the first place.

"James? Gods, this is-" She cut off for a moment. "Get this working. James. Can you hear me?" She asked.

"Yeah." He replied. "You're kinda cutting in and out though."

A moment passed as the signal traveled the several hundred miles through the relays.

"Ah. Good. It's just this stupid necklace device. I keep having to readjust it." She said.

"Got it. How's setup going? And what's the word with the blight creature?" He asked.

Another moment's wait.

"Good. We've got several of the spikes set up around the entrance to the tunnel, and I've set a few more along the way to the main camp. I've also deployed several of the drones in case you want to use the other hub." She replied.

"That's good. What tunnel? What's going on?"

"The creature. Vickers named it a 'Blight Possessed' it came upon a cliff wall that was blocking its path. It simply kept going forward and using its.... disappearing power.... to tunnel through it." She said. "And it seems to be sloping downward, so we think it might be getting close to wherever it's headed. At Vickers' request, we're shoring up the tunnel even now. I set one of the drones so it would keep an eye on it if you want to look."

"Okay. Give me one second. I'll see what we've got." He replied.

"Drone twenty eight Ex?" She informed him using her tablet's phonetic pronunciation of the letter X, which didn't exist in the Petravian language.

James went over to the communication hub and pulled up the drone surveillance controls.

Blight possessed? He thought. *Gotta hand it to Vickers on that one. It's a good name, if it ends up being accurate.*

After a moment's looking he found the drone feed in question and saw a night vision image of the newly made tunnel. He also saw the soldiers currently hauling in wood and supplies as they worked to reinforce it and prevent a collapse. The resolution wasn't good, since the drone was both on a delay, and in low power mode. But it was clear enough.

He went back to the radio.

"Alright. I see it." He said. "What's Vickers' assessment? When's he heading in?"

"I suggested that we head in at first light." She replied. "But he insisted on going in immediately. So he's already been moving for the past hour or so. Myself and a few other soldiers who can handle the dark are going in tomorrow."

James rubbed his forehead in mild frustration at the news. Of course he'd done that. The guy was an asshole.

Why do I suddenly sympathize with the Colonel all of a sudden? He thought as he took a deep breath.

"Okay." He said instead. "Well. You've ridden hard. Get some rest before you head in. Keep us updated if anything changes or if you need any help."

"Will do." She replied. "I'll message you whenever we're about to move."

"Choi out." He said as he set the handset down.

"Uhhh. Okay." She replied awkwardly.

He ignored the confusion and walked back to his and Amina's room. It was late and his arm and hands still ached from the injuries he'd gotten the day before. The glowing green bandages reminding him of his miscalculation. Amina kissed him on the cheek before assuring him that she'd be in bed soon before she turned and headed back to the war room.

Once Amina was around the corner and he'd looked to make sure nobody else was around, James began to focus.

As he did, he slowly pulled his arm from its sling. It hurt, but he'd be okay for a quick test.

He felt the energy begin pooling in his head and eyes.

He wanted to become better with this new spell, even if it might mean a bit of trial and error. He had a feeling that it would come in handy soon.

James held his good arm up and put his hand near his face, smiling as he saw how slowly it moved, and smiling wider as he saw it reflecting orange light once it was only a few inches away.

Keeping the spell active, James got into a racer's stance, as if he was about to run a one hundred meter dash.

Then he began to sprint to the room.

\----------

Traya trudged across the packed snow surrounding the blight lands with her shoulders hunched. It was cold, and even worse it was windy. She used her shield hand to keep her cloak pulled tight as she walked her patrol route. The shield helped block the wind a bit, but not by much, and it weighted a ton over the course of a four hour patrol.

It was horse shit that they had to increase the patrol and guard duties so much. Especially with how many people had been taken out by this so called "blight creature" that had attacked. She didn't believe any of it.

Roylan had been a drunk ass his entire career. And everyone knew it. She'd been almost happy to hear that he'd gone missing.

She knew that he'd probably just gone on a rampage when he'd been caught. Had likely seen no way to avoid the dungeons for deserting his post. Hell, she would in his position.

The only thing that made it odd was how the General had lost a hand.

Roylan might've been a good brawler, most drunks were, and he was alright with a sword. But the General? There was no way he'd beat the General in a fight. Not even close.

These thoughts, and the cold, were what was on Traya's mind and distracted her from the noise of something thumping on the ground.

Still her senses, honed by years as a city guard before this assignment, told her something had changed, and that she needed to listen.

She froze in her tracks and silenced herself as much as she could in the wind.

There was a long, exaggerated, crunch. As if something was moving in the snow, but not by footsteps. Some different kind of movement.

She covered the front of her lantern, hooding it with part of her cloak to smother it. She would need to be able to see, and the light prevented that past a few yards.

Something thumped, as if via impact, off to her right. It had to be at least ten yards away, but it was also heavy whatever it was. She looked to her left and saw one of the other guards on the same path waving their lantern in question.

She uncovered her lantern again and raised it up and down twice. The signal to bring back up.

Then she covered it again and began walking forward, shield up and axe in hand.

There was that sliding crunching sound again. Something rattled.

"If anyone's there!" She yelled. "Speak now and reveal yourself! Or else I'll be on you!"

A low, rumbling, raspy voice tried to say something.

"Hhhhhh." It said.

She turned toward the noise. "Speak!" She yelled.

"HHHHEeeeelpth..... RRrroooyling." It said in an incredibly wet sounding rumble.

She charged forward, expecting to find Roylan, who'd somehow escaped before.

It wasn't Roylan.

"What in the hells?" She asked as she saw it.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (140/?)

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They'd ridden their griffins hard and Kela had been pleasantly surprised at how well Vickers had handled riding Tom. As much as she disliked the man, she couldn't deny that he and the griffin had formed a strong bond as master and mount.

Several of the camp guards approached and helped them off the griffins as they dismounted. There were only a handful of tents in place and as Kela handed the reins over to one of the guards General Sigbert emerged from one of them.

He had his hand hanging from a length of leather stripping around his neck. The fingers flexed and moved at random as he approached them and held his other hand out in greeting. The once large and jolly man had bags under his eyes and looked to have lost some weight since last she'd seen him. Understandable given the stress that current events must have had him under.

"General." Kela said as she clasped wrists with him. "Surprised you haven't headed back to the main camp to see about getting that back on."

He shook his head lightly.

"They can figure that out without me. There's plenty of wounded back there to try it on." He said with none of his prior levity. "If it works, great. If not, then I'll still be where I'm most useful."

"Did you dispatch more guards to watch the blight?" She asked.

"Aye." The General responded gruffly. "And Jadesport its mustering more to back em up. Not that there's much they'll be able to do if anything else does come out."

"True. But at least we'll be able to track anything that does." She replied. Sigbert just grunted in response.

Vickers was standing behind her looking bored.

"This the so-called specialist that Amina's man sent to us?" Sigbert asked as he stepped up close and looked Vickers up and down. Vickers stared him in the eye, not budging an inch.

"This is Chief Sebastien Vickers. Both Captain Choi and his government assure us that he's the perfect man for this kind of job." Kela replied after several moments of the two men awkwardly staring each other down.

"Doesn't look like much." The General said in response.

"I think I can....HANDLE this." Vickers countered.

Sigbert let out a quick chuckle. "Hope so lad." He said. Then he turned back to the tent he'd emerged from. "Come on. I'll show you where it's at." He said as he gestured for them to follow.

Kela looked at Vickers angrily. "Remember that he's a GENERAL." She said. "And a member of the royal family."

"I'll kiss his ring if you want." Vickers said as he began walking toward the tent. "Might be awkward if it's dangling in front of his chest though."

\----------

Several hours later Vickers was at the entrance to the new cave that the creature had created. Kela and the general were nearby setting up another smaller camp that they and the, now unnecessary, griffin talon could stay at to keep an eye on things. He was looking down the tunnel with his glasses, checking to make sure there was nothing there. There wasn't even an ambient temperature difference to signify that anything had been here recently.

"See anything?" Kela asked as she stepped up behind him.

"No. Not even any thermal changes." He replied. "Smell anything?"

She sniffed deeply for several seconds.

"I smell him." She admitted. "But it's old scent, at least two days."

"Matches the report."

"Lots of loose earth too." She added. "Some blood and what not. Decay. I'm guessing that he had run ins with some burrowing creatures and dispatched them like everything else. Or else there might have been a bit of a cave in. Don't know."

He thought about it for a moment. "Find out when I get there." He said.

"We can head in in the morning." She said. "First light."

Vickers looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

"You can wait that long if you want." He said. "But I'm going in." She was a bout to speak when he held up a finger. "AND.... If I'm honest, which I am, I would prefer not to have any of you slowing me down anyways."

"You think IIII will slow you down?" Kela asked with a scoff. "Don't forget who sent you through a tavern wall."

"Door." Vickers corrected her. "Bit different. But this aint about strength. This is a stealth mission. And a seven foot fuzzball aint exactly subtle."

"Subtle enough to get the drop on you." She began, dripping sarcasm. "Regardless, what would the great and, oh so capable, SEAL desire of us, in this operation?"

Vickers didn't so much as acknowledge the tone. "Bout three gallons of water in my little 'infinite fanny pack' here." He said with a light laugh at his own joke. "And in the mean time, shore up these walls, make sure that my way out is still here whenever I decide to come back."

"And what if you DON'T come back?" She asked.

He shrugged. "Well. I guess you won't have to worry about me anymore. Or will have to worry even more because I might end up one of these... blight zombies? Blight possessed?" He turned. "What are we calling this thing?" He asked the General, who was still nearby.

"We're calling it Roylan. After the man it took over." He replied.

Vickers tsssked at the answer. "Lame. I like Blight Possessed. Sounds cooler." He said as he turned around. "Either way. If I don't come back, then odds are that shit is fucked."

"How helpful." Kela said in response.

Vickers shrugged again. "What do ya want from me?" He asked. "I don't know what the fuck this thing's capable of and neither do you. I aint got any fuckin' answers here."

He pulled his pistol from its holster and screwed on its suppressor.

"Anyways. I'm goin in." He said "I'll drop a relay every couple hundred yards. Or whenever my comms start to signal lost signal."

"Check in every noon and midnight." Kela said as she pulled a piece of slate that was pulsing purple light. "Or else the I hit this and-"

"Yeah yeah." Vickers waved her away. "Warden and prisoner nonsense. See ya on the flip side." He said as he walked into the darkness of the cave, pistol at the ready.

Kela waited several minutes for him to be out of earshot.

"Good hunting." She said under her breath. "Ass."

\------------------------

James stood in the courtyard with Alixan and Veliry watching as he focused his energy on the incredibly abstract concept that the prince had helped him understand.

He'd spent the last few days getting more magical training with Veliry, but he'd asked the prince for some pointers too. His fight with the prince had proven that he needed to get better at meshing his magical and martial abilities, and that was a subject that Veliry lacked on somewhat.

It turned out that during the second match the prince had been using a magical spell that enhanced the focus that both his eyes and mind were

capable of. The easiest way to describe the effect was that it basically allowed the prince to put things into slow motion. Not by a significant amount, it was only a marginal improvement. But when coupled with the natural time dilation that most people experienced during adrenaline dumps, it was startlingly potent.

And it had allowed him to effectively ignore, or even manipulate the attacks that James had tried to make

James had manage to startle, and to his amusement humble, the prince's boasts of the spells effect by showing him how fast bullets could go. Or at least the green rubber training bullets he still had left.

The prince had demonstrated the spells effect by literally catching an arrow with one hand, as well as catching one of Veliry's spell attacks with a warded hand too.

Then James had asked him if he could test the upper limits of the perception enhancing spell. The prince had agreed eagerly, happy to show off a bit more.

James had waited to see the tell tale orange glow in Alixan's eyes that meant that the spell was active. Then he'd shot him in the chest plate three times and sent the prince stumbling backwards in surprise. Alixan had rushed over afterwards and insisted that James shoot him some more, or more accurately shoot near him so he could try to catch them. James had refused, citing a low supply of the non-lethal rounds. That was mostly true.

Now, only a day later, James was standing in the courtyard attempting to manifest the same effect. So far to no avail. Veliry had several stones and snowballs swirling around James with her magic, maintaining them at a constant speed so that he could tell when the spell had kicked in.

"He's going to need a catalyst event." Alixan said.

"No." Veliry said. "He already had his at the grabber camp."

"That was to open his mind to magic." Alixan replied. "This is perception magic, you know it's a different field entirely."

"He'll be fine." Veliry countered.

"If you say so." Alixan said smugly.

"Guys." James interrupted. "Trying to focus."

"Sorry." They both replied at the same time.

James continued focusing, drawing the ambient magic in and directing it to his eyes and head, and occasionally cracking an eye open to look around and see if there was a difference.

But several minutes later there had been no noticeable change.

"This isn't working." Alixan whispered to Veliry. "Catalyst time."

He only gave James a split seconds notice. Or, more accurately, Veliry did.

By shouting his name.

"JAMES!" She screamed, half startled and half afraid of what was happening.

James looked up just in time to see the prince's spear flying through the air right at his chest.

His real spear. Not the blunted training spear he'd used a few days before.

The one that had, according to the prince, felled an enemy giant with a single thrust through its skull. Even if that had been exaggerated, and James didn't have reason to think that it was, he knew that it was razor sharp.

James's body flooded with adrenaline. The magical energy he'd already been focusing increased sharply as he panicked. He felt the pressure in his head increase as if he had a migraine, though it didn't hurt.

The spear slowed to a crawl, seeming to almost freeze in mid air.

James looked past it at the prince, shocked that he could do so, and saw a smile forming on Alixan's face. The prince's eyes were glowing the same orange that James suspected his own were.

His body moved almost as if with a will of its own.

He stepped to the side, and lowered as it did, to avoid the spear. At the same time that it did his hands both reached out and grabbed the shaft of the spear before it had managed to even get halfway past him.

He had just a "moment", relatively speaking, to think. *Holy shit. The spell worked.*

Then his focus slipped, a mistake he seemed to make every time he surprised himself, and time went back to normal for his perception.

What he hadn't known about the prince's was the fact that it was SIGNIFICANTLY more heavy than a normal spear. In fact, he had a feeling that it was heavier than Kela's great axe.

That, coupled with how fast it had been flying, resulted in James going along with it as it flew. His eyes widening in shock at the change in events.

\---------------------------

Amina was sitting at her desk when James returned to the room for the night. She had spent the past few days going over troop movements and logistics regarding the area affected by the blight, and tracking "Roylan". As such she wasn't paying attention when James returned.

"How was training dear?" She asked absently as she reviewed some papers.

"Oh. Not so bad." James replied calmly, doing what he could not to wince as he worked to undo his jacket. "Alixan owes me a cask of whatever ale I prefer."

That caught Amina's attention.

"Did he lose a bet with- OH BY THE GODS!" She said as she turned to look at him. "James what happened?" She asked, dropping the papers and rushing over to help him sit down.

"Oh. You know." He started. "Just a good old training accident. Your brother might have tried to impale me."

"What!?!" She asked in confusion. "Why would he do that? How does that explain your arm and hands and hands being splinted and wrapped in healing bandages?"

"He called it a 'Catalyst Event'." James answered. "Oh. Slowly. That hurts." He said as she pulled his jacket off.

"What did he do?" She asked angrily. "I'll put him in healing bandages. That absolute moron!"

"Just threw his spear at me while I wasn't looking." James said calmly as he slowly lowered himself onto the bed with his right arm, which wasn't splinted. "No biggie."

"HE WHAT!?"

"It's fine. It's fine. I'm okay. He said that even if I hadn't dodged it, it would have missed my important organs." James replied. "Pretty sure that was a lie to make me feel better. But I'm too tired to care." He took a deep breath. "I can't undo my boots." He said dejectedly.

"How did that hurt your arms?" Amina asked, ignoring his statement.

"Oh." James said as if surprised at the question. He laughed for just a second. "I caught the spear."

Amina balked at the statement.

"You caught the Giant's Demise?" She asked as if not believing it.

"Well." James began. "It would be more accurate to say that I grabbed it as it was flying."

"That spear weighs nearly two hundred pounds once its enchantment is deactivated." She replied. "If he threw it at you-"

"Grabbing it wouldn't stop it." James interrupted. He held his arms up as best as he could for emphasis. "Yes I'm..... VERY aware of that fact now." He said with a sigh.

It took nearly an hour to get Amina calm enough NOT to storm off to her brother's room and confront him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (140/?)

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Sigbert let out a quick chuckle. "Hope so lad." He said. Then he turned back to the tent he'd emerged from. "Come on. I'll show you where it's at." He said as he gestured for them to follow.

Kela looked at Vickers angrily. "Remember that he's a GENERAL." She said. "And a member of the royal family."

"I'll kiss his ring if you want." Vickers said as he began walking toward the tent. "Might be awkward if it's dangling in front of his chest though."

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Several hours later Vickers was at the entrance to the new cave that the creature had created. Kela and the general were nearby setting up another smaller camp that they and the, now unnecessary, griffin talon could stay at to keep an eye on things. He was looking down the tunnel with his glasses, checking to make sure there was nothing there. There wasn't even an ambient temperature difference to signify that anything had been here recently.

"See anything?" Kela asked as she stepped up behind him.

"No. Not even any thermal changes." He replied. "Smell anything?"

She sniffed deeply for several seconds.

"I smell him." She admitted. "But it's old scent, at least two days."

"Matches the report."

"Lots of loose earth too." She added. "Some blood and what not. Decay. I'm guessing that he had run ins with some burrowing creatures and dispatched them like everything else. Or else there might have been a bit of a cave in. Don't know."

He thought about it for a moment. "Find out when I get there." He said.

"We can head in in the morning." She said. "First light."

Vickers looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

"You can wait that long if you want." He said. "But I'm going in." She was a bout to speak when he held up a finger. "AND.... If I'm honest, which I am, I would prefer not to have any of you slowing me down anyways."

"You think IIII will slow you down?" Kela asked with a scoff. "Don't forget who sent you through a tavern wall."

"Door." Vickers corrected her. "Bit different. But this aint about strength. This is a stealth mission. And a seven foot fuzzball aint exactly subtle."

"Subtle enough to get the drop on you." She began, dripping sarcasm. "Regardless, what would the great and, oh so capable, SEAL desire of us, in this operation?"

Vickers didn't so much as acknowledge the tone. "Bout three gallons of water in my little 'infinite fanny pack' here." He said with a light laugh at his own joke. "And in the mean time, shore up these walls, make sure that my way out is still here whenever I decide to come back."

"And what if you DON'T come back?" She asked.

He shrugged. "Well. I guess you won't have to worry about me anymore. Or will have to worry even more because I might end up one of these... blight zombies? Blight possessed?" He turned. "What are we calling this thing?" He asked the General, who was still nearby.

"We're calling it Roylan. After the man it took over." He replied.

Vickers tsssked at the answer. "Lame. I like Blight Possessed. Sounds cooler." He said as he turned around. "Either way. If I don't come back, then odds are that shit is fucked."

"How helpful." Kela said in response.

Vickers shrugged again. "What do ya want from me?" He asked. "I don't know what the fuck this thing's capable of and neither do you. I aint got any fuckin' answers here."

He pulled his pistol from its holster and screwed on its suppressor.

"Anyways. I'm goin in." He said "I'll drop a relay every couple hundred yards. Or whenever my comms start to signal lost signal."

"Check in every noon and midnight." Kela said as she pulled a piece of slate that was pulsing purple light. "Or else the I hit this and-"

"Yeah yeah." Vickers waved her away. "Warden and prisoner nonsense. See ya on the flip side." He said as he walked into the darkness of the cave, pistol at the ready.

Kela waited several minutes for him to be out of earshot.

"Good hunting." She said under her breath. "Ass."

\------------------------

James stood in the courtyard with Alixan and Veliry watching as he focused his energy on the incredibly abstract concept that the prince had helped him understand.

He'd spent the last few days getting more magical training with Veliry, but he'd asked the prince for some pointers too. His fight with the prince had proven that he needed to get better at meshing his magical and martial abilities, and that was a subject that Veliry lacked on somewhat.

It turned out that during the second match the prince had been using a magical spell that enhanced the focus that both his eyes and mind were capable of. The easiest way to describe the effect was that it basically allowed the prince to put things into slow motion. Not by a significant amount, it was only a marginal improvement. But when coupled with the natural time dilation that most people experienced during adrenaline dumps, it was startlingly potent.

And it had allowed him to effectively ignore, or even manipulate the attacks that James had tried to make

James had manage to startle, and to his amusement humble, the prince's boasts of the spells effect by showing him how fast bullets could go. Or at least the green rubber training bullets he still had left.

The prince had demonstrated the spells effect by literally catching an arrow with one hand, as well as catching one of Veliry's spell attacks with a warded hand too.

Then James had asked him if he could test the upper limits of the perception enhancing spell. The prince had agreed eagerly, happy to show off a bit more.

James had waited to see the tell tale orange glow in Alixan's eyes that meant that the spell was active. Then he'd shot him in the chest plate three times and sent the prince stumbling backwards in surprise. Alixan had rushed over afterwards and insisted that James shoot him some more, or more accurately shoot near him so he could try to catch them. James had refused, citing a low supply of the non-lethal rounds. That was mostly true.

Now, only a day later, James was standing in the courtyard attempting to manifest the same effect. So far to no avail. Veliry had several stones and snowballs swirling around James with her magic, maintaining them at a constant speed so that he could tell when the spell had kicked in.

"He's going to need a catalyst event." Alixan said.

"No." Veliry said. "He already had his at the grabber camp."

"That was to open his mind to magic." Alixan replied. "This is perception magic, you know it's a different field entirely."

"He'll be fine." Veliry countered.

"If you say so." Alixan said smugly.

"Guys." James interrupted. "Trying to focus."

"Sorry." They both replied at the same time.

James continued focusing, drawing the ambient magic in and directing it to his eyes and head, and occasionally cracking an eye open to look around and see if there was a difference.

But several minutes later there had been no noticeable change.

^("This isn't working.") Alixan whispered to Veliry. "^(Catalyst time.")

He only gave James a split seconds notice. Or, more accurately, Veliry did.

By shouting his name.

"JAMES!" She screamed, half startled and half afraid of what was happening.

James looked up just in time to see the prince's spear flying through the air right at his chest.

His real spear. Not the blunted training spear he'd used a few days before.

The one that had, according to the prince, felled an enemy giant with a single thrust through its skull. Even if that had been exaggerated, and James didn't have reason to think that it was, he knew that it was razor sharp.

James's body flooded with adrenaline. The magical energy he'd already been focusing increased sharply as he panicked. He felt the pressure in his head increase as if he had a migraine, though it didn't hurt.

The spear slowed to a crawl, seeming to almost freeze in mid air.

James looked past it at the prince, shocked that he could do so, and saw a smile forming on Alixan's face. The prince's eyes were glowing the same orange that James suspected his own were.

His body moved almost as if with a will of its own.

He stepped to the side, and lowered as it did, to avoid the spear. At the same time that it did his hands both reached out and grabbed the shaft of the spear before it had managed to even get halfway past him.

He had just a "moment", relatively speaking, to think. *Holy shit. The spell worked.*

Then his focus slipped, a mistake he seemed to make every time he surprised himself, and time went back to normal for his perception.

What he hadn't known about the prince's was the fact that it was SIGNIFICANTLY more heavy than a normal spear. In fact, he had a feeling that it was heavier than Kela's great axe.

That, coupled with how fast it had been flying, resulted in James going along with it as it flew. His eyes widening in shock at the change in events.

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Amina was sitting at her desk when James returned to the room for the night. She had spent the past few days going over troop movements and logistics regarding the area affected by the blight, and tracking "Roylan". As such she wasn't paying attention when James returned.

"How was training dear?" She asked absently as she reviewed some papers.

"Oh. Not so bad." James replied calmly, doing what he could not to wince as he worked to undo his jacket. "Alixan owes me a cask of whatever ale I prefer."

That caught Amina's attention.

"Did he lose a bet with- OH BY THE GODS!" She said as she turned to look at him. "James what happened?" She asked, dropping the papers and rushing over to help him sit down.

"Oh. You know." He started. "Just a good old training accident. Your brother might have tried to impale me."

"What!?!" She asked in confusion. "Why would he do that? How does that explain your arm and hands being splinted and wrapped in healing bandages?"

"He called it a 'Catalyst Event'." James answered. "Oh. Slowly. That hurts." He said as she pulled his jacket off.

"What did he do?" She asked angrily. "I'll put him in healing bandages. That absolute moron!"

"Just threw his spear at me while I wasn't looking." James said calmly as he slowly lowered himself onto the bed with his right arm, which wasn't splinted. "No biggie."

"HE WHAT!?"

"It's fine. It's fine. I'm okay. He said that even if I hadn't dodged it, it would have missed my important organs." James replied. "Pretty sure that was a lie to make me feel better. But I'm too tired to care." He took a deep breath. "I can't undo my boots." He said dejectedly.

"How did that hurt your arms?" Amina asked, ignoring his statement.

"Oh." James said as if surprised at the question. He laughed for just a second. "I caught the spear."

Amina balked at the statement.

"You caught the Giant's Demise?" She asked as if not believing it.

"Well." James began. "It would be more accurate to say that I grabbed it as it was flying."

"That spear weighs nearly two hundred pounds once its enchantment is deactivated." She replied. "If he threw it at you-"

"Grabbing it wouldn't stop it." James interrupted. He held his arms up as best as he could for emphasis. "Yes I'm..... VERY aware of that fact now." He said with a sigh.

It took nearly an hour to get Amina calm enough NOT to storm off to her brother's room and confront him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (139/?)

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wind magic. So instead he'd simply coiled it around his left arm and was using it as a combination of armor and a weight for his punches.

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Prince Alixan read the attack and tried to bring the spear down to block. But James had gotten the better of him for a change, so instead he slid his hands back down the spear's shaft towards its end. James's attack batted the spear upwards, and the weight of the still moving chain carried the spear past where Alixan had meant to take it.

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If there was one up side to the second match it was that the prince didn't add anymore bruises to James's current collection.

He'd attacked with his spear plenty of times, but almost always as a distraction from the spells he was putting into effect.

The combination of near constant spell effects and a barrage of spear attacks, that he couldn't even defeat on their own, had left James reeling and unable to formulate any kind of counter attack for even a few moments.

If he had expected anything besides defeat, especially with how one sided the first match had been, it might have been embarrassing. But as it was, it simply reaffirmed the fact that he needed to continue training.

It helped that, unlike Artair, the crown prince was actually humble in his victory. He taunted James a bit about it. But ultimately he was doing so in a friendly way, and not in the obnoxious mean way that his younger brother would have.

The four of them; James, Alixan, Amina, and Veliry reviewed the fights over ale and wine in the dining hall. Veliry chastised him lightly for his inability to focus, while also admitting that doing so in such a situation was beyond what a mere apprentice would be expected to handle. Amina and the prince both gave him pointers on how to improve his swordsmanship and footwork.

They didn't mention the subject that was looming over everyone who was aware of what was happening up north. They actively avoided speaking about it.

After all, they wouldn't get any more useful information until Vickers and Kela got on site.

Until then, anything they said would simply be conjecture.

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"Roylan" did not let a near vertical cliff face stop It.

If anything the cliff was a good marker for the beginning of It's descent.

It was close enough to It's goal that it might as well start going downward now.

It pondered the cliff face for only a moment. It had finally figured out how this body worked and was able to use it just fine.

It wondered if the cliff would cause any problems. But decided that it didn't matter.

It looked up at the griffins up above. It knew from Roylan's memories that they had riders and were watching It.

They didn't matter.

It approached the cliff and continued walking. It focused on its ability and expanded it a bit.

The stone and earth in front of It vanished into thin air.

One of the griffins swooped down lower. It's senses noticed it and warned of an attack. But the griffin rider stopped the beast before coming down all the way. It was just watching.

It continued walking. And where It walked the mountain that the cliff was a part of, vanished.

The path that it left behind angled gently downward.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (139/?)

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The combination of near constant spell effects and a barrage of spear attacks, that he couldn't even defeat on their own, had left James reeling and unable to formulate any kind of counter attack for even a few moments.

If he had expected anything besides defeat, especially with how one sided the first match had been, it might have been embarrassing. But as it was, it simply reaffirmed the fact that he needed to continue training.

It helped that, unlike Artair, the crown prince was actually humble in his victory. He taunted James a bit about it. But ultimately he was doing so in a friendly way, and not in the obnoxious mean way that his younger brother would have.

The four of them; James, Alixan, Amina, and Veliry reviewed the fights over ale and wine in the dining hall. Veliry chastised him lightly for his inability to focus, while also admitting that doing so in such a situation was beyond what a mere apprentice would be expected to handle. Amina and the prince both gave him pointers on how to improve his swordsmanship and footwork.

They didn't mention the subject that was looming over everyone who was aware of what was happening up north. They actively avoided speaking about it.

After all, they wouldn't get any more useful information until Vickers and Kela got on site.

Until then, anything they said would simply be conjecture.

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"Roylan" did not let a near vertical cliff face stop It.

If anything the cliff was a good marker for the beginning of It's descent.

It was close enough to It's goal that it might as well start going downward now.

It pondered the cliff face for only a moment. It had finally figured out how this body worked and was able to use it just fine.

It wondered if the cliff would cause any problems. But decided that it didn't matter.

It looked up at the griffins up above. It knew from Roylan's memories that they had riders and were watching It.

They didn't matter.

It approached the cliff and continued walking. It focused on its ability and expanded it a bit.

The stone and earth in front of It vanished into thin air.

One of the griffins swooped down lower. It's senses noticed it and warned of an attack. But the griffin rider stopped the beast before coming down all the way. It was just watching.

It continued walking. And where It walked the mountain that the cliff was a part of, vanished.

The path that it left behind angled gently downward.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/uihq4o/wait_is_this_just_gate_140/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (138/?)

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"Adjust fire as needed and if shit starts hitting fans, try stay clean." James replied.

The General took a deep breath then nodded slowly.

"Fair enough." He said. "What about this creature? Any new information yet?"

"Not on our end sir. Just positional data from the observers. It's taken out a few creatures that have accosted it. But it hasn't shown any new abilities." James said. "I was actually wondering if you guys had any theories about the blight that might help a bit."

"That's right. You mentioned that they thought it was weaponizing the anomalies." The General said. "We still don't have any ideas of how the creature itself works. We won't until Chief Vickers and Captain Swiftrunner get on site and begin transmitting data via the network relays."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (138/?)

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PS r/GATEhouse *is up and running and starting to spawn side stories for anyone interested.*

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Wait, is this just GATE? (137/?)

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Writer's note: I may love it when a plan comes together. But first there has to BE a plan.

And here's a few different ones.

Enjoy

\~

"Sooooo....." James said hesitantly. "This sounds all kinds of terrible."

He was seated at one of the tables in the war room. Amina, looking a lot less disheveled than when they'd run into Kela outside their room, was standing in her unarmored duty uniform near her father rereading the message. One of the commanders, whose name James couldn't remember at the moment, had just recounted the message for the new arrivals. Prince

Alixan sat in a chair at a different table trying to stay seated upright. The King was glowering in the chair in front of them all.

"No. It's not" The King agreed.

"It's good that the General had his men follow it." Kela weighed in. "Odd that it's seemingly non-hostile though."

"I find it odd that the General's hand still works despite being detached from what's left of his arm." Veliry added. "If the creature came from the blight as they suspect than we have to assume that that's where it's sending things." She said as she paced about the room muttering to herself.

"I've already dispatched a talon of our griffin cavalry to intercept the creature based on the course Sig indicated." The King said. "They're going to observe its movements and begin sending dispatches of its actions once they do."

"What's our plan?" Amina asked as she handed the message scroll back to the Commander who'd read it. "Better yet, we need to figure out what it's plan is."

"And where the hells it's going." Alixan said with a wince. "According to the message it's attempting to find the 'Leader of this world'." He added. "Far as I'm aware this world doesn't bloody have one. But it emerged in our country, so why isn't it headed here?"

James had to admit some surprise that the prince could have such cohesive thoughts in his current state.

"Both good questions." The King agreed. "We need to discover both before it gets to them, wherever and whoever they are."

Something about that nagged at James's mind as the others continued talking. But the thing that kept popping up was painful to think of. His head felt light and yet full of pressure as he tried to think of what it was trying to pull up. Then he remembered the night, only a few weeks earlier. The memories of the unconscious pain he'd felt made him want to run from the memory.

"My men and I could fly there and meet up with the talon you dispatched." Alixan offered. "Our griffins are faster, and we're better riders."

"Out of the question." The King countered. "This damn thing made half of Sig's camp either die or end up missing body parts and didn't take a scratch. I'm not risking YOU to it." He turned and cut Amina off before she could even speak. "Not you either. Or Captain Choi."

That snapped James out of his thoughts.

"Hey." He interjected.

"That's my word, and it's final." The King said, looking at Choi. "Not until we have more information."

James waved the words away. King Farrick looked somewhat irritated by the gesture.

"Hey. Do we have any theories on where THE AGENCY calls home?" He asked.

The room grew quiet suddenly as everyone looked at him with confusion.

"Why the hell would you bring their gods forsaken name into this?" Marcos asked.

"A good question." The King agreed. "Why do you bring them up Captain Choi?"

"Well." He began. He wasn't sure how to begin. "Just. Something about how it's heading to.... whoever it considers the leader, or leaders, of this world. Like you said; this world doesn't really have a leader. But even if it did. YOU." He gestured at King Farrick. "Are the leader of this part of the world like the prince said."

"Thank you." Alixan said, though nobody paid any attention.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (137/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ue4yg3/wait_is_this_just_gate_136/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I may love it when a plan comes together. But first there has to BE a plan.

And here's a few different ones.

Enjoy

PS: Weekly reminder that r/GATEhouse *exists for those interested.*

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"Sooooo....." James said hesitantly. "This sounds all kinds of terrible."

He was seated at one of the tables in the war room. Amina, looking a lot less disheveled than when they'd run into Kela outside their room, was standing in her unarmored duty uniform near her father rereading the message. One of the commanders, whose name James couldn't remember at the moment, had just recounted the message for the new arrivals. Prince Alixan sat in a chair at a different table trying to stay seated upright. The King was glowering in the chair in front of them all.

"No. It's not" The King agreed.

"It's good that the General had his men follow it." Kela weighed in. "Odd that it's seemingly non-hostile though."

"I find it odd that the General's hand still works despite being detached from what's left of his arm." Veliry added. "If the creature came from the blight as they suspect than we have to assume that that's where it's sending things." She said as she paced about the room muttering to herself.

"I've already dispatched a talon of our griffin cavalry to intercept the creature based on the course Sig indicated." The King said. "They're going to observe its movements and begin sending dispatches of its actions once they do."

"What's our plan?" Amina asked as she handed the message scroll back to the Commander who'd read it. "Better yet, we need to figure out what it's plan is."

"And where the hells it's going." Alixan said with a wince. "According to the message it's attempting to find the 'Leader of this world'." He added. "Far as I'm aware this world doesn't bloody have one. But it emerged in our country, so why isn't it headed here?"

James had to admit some surprise that the prince could have such cohesive thoughts in his current state.

"Both good questions." The King agreed. "We need to discover both before it gets to them, wherever and whoever they are."

Something about that nagged at James's mind as the others continued talking. But the thing that kept popping up was painful to think of. His head felt light and yet full of pressure as he tried to think of what it was trying to pull up. Then he remembered the night, only a few weeks earlier. The memories of the unconscious pain he'd felt made him want to run from the memory.

"My men and I could fly there and meet up with the talon you dispatched." Alixan offered. "Our griffins are faster, and we're better riders."

"Out of the question." The King countered. "This damn thing made half of Sig's camp either die or end up missing body parts and didn't take a scratch. I'm not risking YOU to it." He turned and cut Amina off before she could even speak. "Not you either. Or Captain Choi."

That snapped James out of his thoughts.

"Hey." He interjected.

"That's my word, and it's final." The King said, looking at Choi. "Not until we have more information."

James waved the words away. King Farrick looked somewhat irritated by the gesture.

"Hey. Do we have any theories on where THE AGENCY calls home?" He asked.

The room grew quiet suddenly as everyone looked at him with confusion.

"Why the hell would you bring their gods forsaken name into this?" Marcos asked.

"A good question." The King agreed. "Why do you bring them up Captain Choi?"

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"Sorry. What I'm saying is. We've got the teleporter. But we don't know how the DATA part of it occurs, so to speak. And additionally the other side DOESN'T have the teleporter. Their version is an incredibly powerful and difficult spell that only gets used every few hundred years. We're effectively sending scanned documents via email to someone who HAS a computer that can receive them, but doesn't have a scanner of their own, and whose internet connection is shitty at the best of times."

"But they've been able to send things back to us?" The General replies.

"Yes. But only when WE have opened the door. And as you've seen, everything living comes back dead. Or in the blood's case, explodes." The Doctor says. "Additionally. Something occurs on the way over that effects the traveling person's Locality. Alters them on a cellular and potentially even atomic level. It.... I don't know... does something that allows them to adapt to the magical quality of the world over there. And it kind of has to happen instantly or else the mice that were only there for a few seconds would have returned just fine. But it also gets progressively more..... saturated..... The effect gets stronger as you stay there."

"So what does this mean for getting them back?"

"Well. Unless the people on that side have a 'return' spell. We might never be able to retrieve them. Not without a massive breakthrough in fields of science that we can't legally involve more people in anyways." Dr Scholz replies.

General Krick takes a long drag off of his caffeine/CBD cigarette as he thinks.

"Would sending a Doorbell device over there work?" He asks after a few silent seconds.

"That was actually going to be my suggestion sir." Dr. Scholz replies. "Granted, it's not a guarantee. Neither Captain Choi, OR Chief Vickers has the ability to set one up. Also, we have no idea what effect the world's magical nature might have on it. Even if it functions perfectly, it might not send anything to OUR universe." He scratches his head in confusion. "Truth is. Nobody has an answer. It's just a theory."

"Isn't all science?" The General asks as he stands up to look out the observation window.

The two of them stand in awkward silence for a moment as the General thinks. Finally he speaks again.

"Thank you doctor. You've given me a lot to think about." He gestures towards the door. "Please, return to your work. I'll let you know when I've come to a decision."

"Of course sir. Let me know if you have any questions." The Doctor says as he quietly exits the room.

The General lights another smoke as he continues looking at the massive device in the room below him.

\----------

"Okay." Prince Alixan says as he staggers a few steps down the hall to his room. "If burgers are the simplest recipe you've brought to our world. Then I may actually need to steal you from my sister and hire you as my personal chef."

"I'm glad you liked them." James replies, ignoring the way Amina defensively wraps her arms around him. "But not happening."

"Indeed." Amina adds. "He's not going anywhere without me right behind him.

"Deal." Alixan says as he begins walking away, swaying slightly from the ale they'd drank that night. "Remember!" He yells over his shoulder. "Duel! Tomorrow morning!"

"For such a large guy. He's a hell of a light weight." James says to Amina before kissing her on her forehead. "You're on!" He yells back.

"He always has been." She replies as the two of them begin heading to their room. "I think he likes you."

"Yeah. I think so too." James agrees. "Good to know that the future king isn't a bad guy."

"Who Xan?" She asks groggily. "Xan's a great guy. Just a bit of an oddball."

"I'd picked up on that part." James said. "Think I can take him tomorrow?"

Amina seemed to think for a moment.

"One on one? Suppose it depends on whether or not magic's allowed. If so, then I'm sorry to say that your odds aren't good darling." She replies.

"He's a good caster?"

"One of the best in the land. He'd be an arch mage himself if he wasn't a crown prince." She says proudly.

"Good to know." He says to himself.

The two of them round the corner to see Kela and two guards standing near the door.

Amina straightened up from her wine induced sway.

"What's going on?" She asks, only a hint of a slur.

"There's been a message." Kela said grimly. "Something's gone wrong with General Sigbert."

"We've been sent to bring you to the war room General." One of the guards added.

Kela waved a hand at him.

"It's fine Sergeant. Message delivered. Let the king know that she'll be there soon enough."

The Sergeant looked at Kela for a moment, then at Amina. Then he nodded and took the other guard with him. Once they left Kela turned back.

"Take five to sober up a bit." She said quietly.

Amina nodded. The "thank you" was left unsaid between the two long time friends.

"You too James. It's related to the blight. The King will want you there too."

"Kinda figured." James replied.

He was about to walk into the room with Amina when Kela stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"It's bad."

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"Sorry. What I'm saying is. We've got the teleporter. But we don't know how the DATA part of it occurs, so to speak. And additionally the other side DOESN'T have the teleporter. Their version is an incredibly powerful and difficult spell that only gets used every few hundred years. We're effectively sending scanned documents via email to someone who HAS a computer that can receive them, but doesn't have a scanner of their own, and whose internet connection is shitty at the best of times."

"But they've been able to send things back to us?" The General replies.

"Yes. But only when WE have opened the door. And as you've seen, everything living comes back dead. Or in the blood's case, explodes." The Doctor says. "Additionally. Something occurs on the way over that effects the traveling person's Locality. Alters them on a cellular and potentially even atomic level. It.... I don't know... does something that allows them to adapt to the magical quality of the world over there. And it kind of has to happen instantly or else the mice that were only there for a few seconds would have returned just fine. But it also gets progressively more..... saturated..... The effect gets stronger as you stay there."

"So what does this mean for getting them back?"

"Well. Unless the people on that side have a 'return' spell. We might never be able to retrieve them. Not without a massive breakthrough in fields of science that we can't legally involve more people in anyways." Dr Scholz replies.

General Krick takes a long drag off of his caffeine/CBD cigarette as he thinks.

"Would sending a Doorbell device over there work?" He asks after a few silent seconds.

"That was actually going to be my suggestion sir." Dr. Scholz replies. "Granted, it's not a guarantee. Neither Captain Choi, OR Chief Vickers has the ability to set one up. Also, we have no idea what effect the world's magical nature might have on it. Even if it functions perfectly,

it might not send anything to OUR universe." He scratches his head in confusion. "Truth is. Nobody has an answer. It's just a theory."

"Isn't all science?" The General asks as he stands up to look out the observation window.

The two of them stand in awkward silence for a moment as the General thinks. Finally he speaks again.

"Thank you doctor. You've given me a lot to think about." He gestures towards the door. "Please, return to your work. I'll let you know when I've come to a decision."

"Of course sir. Let me know if you have any questions." The Doctor says as he quietly exits the room.

The General lights another smoke as he continues looking at the massive device in the room below him.

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"Okay." Prince Alixan says as he staggers a few steps down the hall to his room. "If burgers are the simplest recipe you've brought to our world. Then I may actually need to steal you from my sister and hire you as my personal chef."

"I'm glad you liked them." James replies, ignoring the way Amina defensively wraps her arms around him. "But not happening."

"Indeed." Amina adds. "He's not going anywhere without me right behind him.

"Deal." Alixan says as he begins walking away, swaying slightly from the ale they'd drank that night. "Remember!" He yells over his shoulder. "Duel! Tomorrow morning!"

"For such a large guy. He's a hell of a light weight." James says to Amina before kissing her on her forehead. "You're on!" He yells back.

"He always has been." She replies as the two of them begin heading to their room. "I think he likes you."

"Yeah. I think so too." James agrees. "Good to know that the future king isn't a bad guy."

"Who Xan?" She asks groggily. "Xan's a great guy. Just a bit of an oddball."

"I'd picked up on that part." James said. "Think I can take him tomorrow?"

Amina seemed to think for a moment.

"One on one? Suppose it depends on whether or not magic's allowed. If so, then I'm sorry to say that your odds aren't good darling." She replies.

"He's a good caster?"

"One of the best in the land. He'd be an arch mage himself if he wasn't a crown prince." She says proudly.

"Good to know." He says to himself.

The two of them round the corner to see Kela and two guards standing near the door.

Amina straightened up from her wine induced sway.

"What's going on?" She asks, only a hint of a slur.

"There's been a message." Kela said grimly. "Something's gone wrong with General Sigbert."

"We've been sent to bring you to the war room General." One of the guards added.

Kela waved a hand at him.

"It's fine Sergeant. Message delivered. Let the king know that she'll be there soon enough."

The Sergeant looked at Kela for a moment, then at Amina. Then he nodded and took the other guard with him. Once they left Kela turned back.

"Take five to sober up a bit." She said quietly.

Amina nodded. The "thank you" was left unsaid between the two long time friends.

"You too James. It's related to the blight. The King will want you there too."

"Kinda figured." James replied.

He was about to walk into the room with Amina when Kela stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"It's bad."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/uevo4u/wait_is_this_just_gate_137/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (135/?)

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Writer's note: Not a lot today, though the plot does thicken a touch. Feelin tired as hell. Not from this. Just a busy week at work.

Enjoy.

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It was as he was musing on this that a massive shadow flew over him as he ran.

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"Ah! Dude!" James exclaimed as he tried to wipe the lizard saliva out of his hair. "Gross! Soar loser." He said as he bopped the drakes nose with his hand.

Steve's head shot up and locked onto something.

James turned around and saw the prince, sitting atop his griffin in the middle of the path.

James kept his hand on the butt of the pistol.

"Morning." He said calmly.

The prince took off his raven-visage helmet, letting his long blond hair spill out of the back.

"Good morning." He responded as he scratched his head. "I was confused when Kels told me that you'd gone for a run. But she assured me that it

was normal for you. Still, I expected you to be close to the castle at least. But you're almost eight miles out. Does everyone on your world run that well?" The prince asked with an eyebrow raised.

"No." James admitted. "But some do. I do." He said as he climbed up onto Steve's back. "Can I help you with something?" He asked, confused at the sudden interruption to his exercise.

"Have I done something to offend?" The prince asked. "If so I didn't mean to."

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"Anyways." James said, getting the prince's attention again. "Is there something I can do for you? Or did you just come out here to watch me run?"

"Actually, yes there is." The prince said as his griffin began to calmly walk over to where James and Steve were standing.

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He patted Steve's neck.

"Not right now boy." He said to the beast. "At least not until I give the word."

"Relax." Said the prince as he pulled up next to James and gesture for him to turn around. "Ride back with me. Let's talk." He said. Then he smirked. "And don't worry. I'm nothing like little Arty."

Then he continued riding.

James watched him for a minute, curious of what this was about. He looked at Steve. Steve was looking back at him his typical uncaring face.

James nodded his head in the prince's direction and kicked his feet against Steve's ribs lightly. Steve turned and began moving to catch up.

"So what do you wanna talk about?" James asked as he finally caught up a few moments later.

"Right to it eh?" Alixan asked. "Fair enough. It's simple really." He paused as he turned in his seat. "First; besides stopping the Vanishing Blight, if that's even possible, what are your intentions while here in our world?" Then the prince looked right at him. "Also, what are your intentions with my little sister?"

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"All the time." James answered.

"Good to know. So you know why I'm doing it?"

"Of course. Gotta look out for the family. Especially with how close you and Amina seem to be." James said. "I'm just glad that I was wrong."

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"Well. Can't lie. I thought you were trying to hit on me." James admitted. "Couldn't really tell which way you were swinging last night. And now this whole dramatic thing."

"Oh please." The prince said with a tisk. "I'll readily admit that I have no qualms with bedding men. But you're not my type."

James's eyes went wide at the sudden and unexpected admittance.

The prince turned to him with a look of amusement.

"Too short." He said with a chuckle. "Besides, I do PREFER women. And I have a betrothed of my own back down south. She simply hates the cold."

"Noted." James said awkwardly. This conversation had taken an awkward turn.

"But." The prince resumed. "I do need to know the answer to my questions." He said as he turned back. "I care deeply for my family, and Amina most of all. Besides, if something were to happen to me, she'd be next in line for the throne." He looked James in the eyes. "In other words, YOU would be married to the Queen of the kingdom at some point." He shrugged. "So I need to know what kind of man you are."

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"Honestly?" He asked rhetorically. "Mostly just surviving and trying to keep our worlds at peace with each other." James admitted.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (134/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Bit of backstory on a few characters. Also James knows that laughter is the key a lot of things.

\~

"So are these the clothes of your world?" Prince Alixan asked as he sat down across the table from James.

The feast had been going on for almost two hours now, and this was the first interaction James had had with the prince since the awkward greeting in the main hall. The prince had spent the last couple hours answering questions from the King, Amina, and several other members of the royal entourage. He'd also spent more than a little time recounting several stories from his time away from the capital. He also told several funny stories from his youth, a lot of which involved Amina.

That had piqued James's interest. Amina seemed to dote on her older brother. James recognized the look of admiration on her face, he'd seen it plenty of times on Joey's face back home. He resisted the urge to be jealous of the attention. But it was still there.

"Uh. Yeah." James answered. "This is my military's dress uniform." He said as he gestured to the clothes in question. His jacket and cap were hanging from the back of the chair.

The prince reached across as if to touch James's sleeve, but stopped at the last moment. "Do you mind?" He asked.

"Um. Sure." James said awkwardly as he held his arm up. The prince pinched it between his fingers.

"Oh. That's as nice as any of our finest cloths. Minus spider silk or enchanted Elven thread." He said as he ran his fingers across the material. "Your whole military wears this?"

"Only for dressy occasions like this." James replied.

"Interesting. Is there armor hidden in it?" The prince asked. "Or weapons?"

James shook his head a little. "Just the sword and pistol on my belt." He admitted. "Other than that its just a bunch of cloth."

"Awfully bold given what happened last time you were at a ceremony." The prince said as he sat back and relaxed. "Grinner eh?" He asked. "Been a thorn in the world's paw for centuries now. Dead in seconds. Not bad"

James was caught off foot at the sudden change of topic.

"Captain Choi is actually a skilled warrior." Kela weighed in from her seat beside James. "In his world he was already skilled with his weapons

of choice. But our training in this world has made him even more capable."

James looked over. Surprised at Kela's addition to the conversation. The wolf captain once again looked uncomfortable around the prince.

"Ah yes. That's right." The prince said with a grin as he sat forward again. "Kels didn't he kill you almost as soon as he got here?"

Kels? James thought.

"Yes." She admitted, looking even more flustered. "I'm sure that you've heard that I'm packed with him now."

The prince looked at James with a devilish grin. "Most interesting." He said.

Tall as hell, deep voice, crown prince in badass armor. Guy must have his choice of women. James thought. *Or guys..... Wait. Am I being flirted with?* He wondered. *Or just sized up?*

King Farrick called for the prince and gestured for him to come back to his spot. Alixan acknowledged his father and pushed his chair back.

"Killed a werewolf. Tamed and spirit bonded a variant drake. Killed an entire grabber clan. Killed the grinner." The prince said as he stood up. "Hmmm. I think I see what my little sister does."

Then he was walking back around the table and back to his spot next to the King.

What the fuck was that about? James wondered.

Kela sighed and seemed to relax next to him. James looked over at her curiously.

"Kels?" He asked.

"Don't call me that." She answered brusquely.

\----------"So...." James began as he and Amina bedded down for the night. "Your brother is.... interesting." He said as he changed out of his uniform.

"Isn't he great?" She asked. "I've missed him since he left."

"Yeah. I can tell." James replied. "You reminded me of the way my little brother looks at me."

"Jealous?" She asked, prodding him in the ribs as she walked over to her armor rack.

"Eh. A little. But I recognize sibling love when I see it. Like I said; reminded me of Joey." He said.

"I can't really help it. He was the oldest brother and I was the oldest sister. We oversaw our other siblings quite a bit. Plus he was the one that convinced my father to let me join him for swordsmanship training." She said as she began unbuckling her greaves. "And I was the one that helped him be less awkward around girls. Should've seen him, he was all legs and arms. He looked like a long walker spider."

"Speaking of which." James began. "What's the deal with him and Kela?" He asked. "She was acting like a bashful schoolgirl around him, and he kept calling her 'Kels'. What's that about?"

"She's still acting awkward around him?" She asked as she finally got her left greave off. She'd been struggling with the last strap for a moment. "Kela had a die hard crush on him when we were little girls. Guess it's still there a bit."

"But she's married to Jurl?"

"Yes." Amina replied. "And make no mistake. She loves Jurl to the moon and back." She grunted for a moment as she reached back to get the strap for her shoulder guards. James stepped over and undid the strap for her. "But it's hard to forget your first crush. Doesn't help that even when he rejected her he was a gentleman about it." She said as she let James help with the other shoulder. "Oh, that's so much better." She said as she finally took her arm and shoulder armor off and began undoing her chest plate.

"He turned her down?" James asked. "That's gotta sting a bit."

"No other option." Amina replied. "A werewolf can't take the throne. So they wouldn't have been able to produce legitimate heirs. He'd have either had to abdicate his title as crown prince, or have a royal consort to produce children on their behalf."

"Wait. So he wasn't actually opposed to being with Kela?"

"No." She replied. "And that's probably the part that made the crush stick." She said as she got the chest plate off and let out a sigh of relief. After a moment of relaxing she took off the undercoat beneath it and headed into her private bathing room. "If he'd rejected her simply because he wasn't interested, she'd have probably moved on ages ago. But he was interested, and he simply put his duty to the throne and the family first."

James thought about it for a moment.

"Oh god." He said after a moment. "Duty, throne, and family. That probably gave Kela an even bigger crush on him." He said.

"Now you see the problem." Amina said as she walked back in. James could hear the bath filling in the room behind her. "She was heartbroken of course. But..... well, you saw the result of it all."

"Think she'll be okay?" He asked.

"She will." Amina said as she took of the last few pieces of her under armor padding and tossed them into her closet. "She'll be awkward for the first few days. Then she'll go visit Jurl and the children on her days off and come back as solid as she was before he showed up."

"Well that's good." He said as he finally got out of his pants and unhooked the shirt stays that he'd requested be sent over with his uniform. "Should we talk to her?"

"I will." Amina replied. "You don't say a damn thing about any of this."

"Yeah that's fair." James said as he leaned back on the bed.

He heard a splash of water as Amina got into her bathtub.

"Are you coming dear?" She asked from the other room.

"You gotta stop asking that!" He half yelled as he shot to his feet. "The answer's always gonna be the same." He said as he slid into the bathroom in his best copy of the Risky Business move. "I'm about to be." He said with a cheesy exaggerated smile and his eyes intentionally crossed.

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"Why?" He asked as he contorted his face even more. He added a lisp as he asked, "What's wrong with my face?"

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Wait, is this just GATE? (134/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ubtyyw/wait_is_this_just_gate_133/) /
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Writer's note: Bit of backstory on a few characters. Also James knows that laughter is the key a lot of things.

\~

"So are these the clothes of your world?" Prince Alixan asked as he sat down across the table from James.

The feast had been going on for almost two hours now, and this was the first interaction James had had with the prince since the awkward greeting in the main hall. The prince had spent the last couple hours answering questions from the King, Amina, and several other members of the royal entourage. He'd also spent more than a little time recounting several stories from his time away from the capital. He also told several funny stories from his youth, a lot of which involved Amina.

That had piqued James's interest. Amina seemed to dote on her older brother. James recognized the look of admiration on her face, he'd seen it plenty of times on Joey's face back home. He resisted the urge to be jealous of the attention. But it was still there.

"Uh. Yeah." James answered. "This is my military's dress uniform." He said as he gestured to the clothes in question. His jacket and cap were hanging from the back of the chair.

The prince reached across as if to touch James's sleeve, but stopped at the last moment. "Do you mind?" He asked.

"Um. Sure." James said awkwardly as he held his arm up. The prince pinched it between his fingers.

"Oh. That's as nice as any of our finest cloths. Minus spider silk or enchanted Elven thread." He said as he ran his fingers across the material. "Your whole military wears this?"

"Only for dressy occasions like this." James replied.

"Interesting. Is there armor hidden in it?" The prince asked. "Or weapons?"

James shook his head a little. "Just the sword and pistol on my belt." He admitted. "Other than that its just a bunch of cloth."

"Awfully bold given what happened last time you were at a ceremony." The prince said as he sat back and relaxed. "Grinner eh?" He asked. "Been a thorn in the world's paw for centuries now. Dead in seconds. Not bad"

James was caught off foot at the sudden change of topic.

"Captain Choi is actually a skilled warrior." Kela weighed in from her seat beside James. "In his world he was already skilled with his weapons of choice. But our training in this world has made him even more capable."

James looked over. Surprised at Kela's addition to the conversation. The wolf captain once again looked uncomfortable around the prince.

"Ah yes. That's right." The prince said with a grin as he sat forward again. "Kels didn't he kill you almost as soon as he got here?"

Kels? James thought.

"Yes." She admitted, looking even more flustered. "I'm sure that you've heard that I'm packed with him now."

The prince looked at James with a devilish grin. "Most interesting." He said.

Tall as hell, deep voice, crown prince in badass armor. Guy must have his choice of women. James thought. *Or guys..... Wait. Am I being flirted with?* He wondered. *Or just sized up?*

King Farrick called for the prince and gestured for him to come back to his spot. Alixan acknowledged his father and pushed his chair back.

"Killed a werewolf. Tamed and spirit bonded a variant drake. Killed an entire grabber clan. Killed the grinner." The prince said as he stood up. "Hmmm. I think I see what my little sister does."

Then he was walking back around the table and back to his spot next to the King.

What the fuck was that about? James wondered.

Kela sighed and seemed to relax next to him. James looked over at her curiously.

"Kels?" He asked.

"Don't call me that." She answered brusquely.

\----------"So...." James began as he and Amina bedded down for the night. "Your brother is.... interesting." He said as he changed out of his uniform.

"Isn't he great?" She asked. "I've missed him since he left."

"Yeah. I can tell." James replied. "You reminded me of the way my little brother looks at me."

"Jealous?" She asked, prodding him in the ribs as she walked over to her armor rack.

"Eh. A little. But I recognize sibling love when I see it. Like I said; reminded me of Joey." He said.

"I can't really help it. He was the oldest brother and I was the oldest sister. We oversaw our other siblings quite a bit. Plus he was the one that convinced my father to let me join him for swordsmanship training." She said as she began unbuckling her greaves. "And I was the one that helped him be less awkward around girls. Should've seen him, he was all legs and arms. He looked like a long walker spider."

"Speaking of which." James began. "What's the deal with him and Kela?" He asked. "She was acting like a bashful schoolgirl around him, and he kept calling her 'Kels'. What's that about?"

"She's still acting awkward around him?" She asked as she finally got her left greave off. She'd been struggling with the last strap for a moment. "Kela had a die hard crush on him when we were little girls. Guess it's still there a bit."

"But she's married to Jurl?"

"Yes." Amina replied. "And make no mistake. She loves Jurl to the moon and back." She grunted for a moment as she reached back to get the strap for her shoulder guards. James stepped over and undid the strap for her. "But it's hard to forget your first crush. Doesn't help that even when he rejected her he was a gentleman about it." She said as she let James help with the other shoulder. "Oh, that's so much better." She said as she finally took her arm and shoulder armor off and began undoing her chest plate.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (133/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u9m8bh/wait_is_this_just_gate_132/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Enjoy.

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"So." James began as he put on his dress uniform. "We're meeting your brother today? Your older brother?" The uniform was new, having been sent over from Earth only a few weeks earlier. It had all the fittings

of an officer's uniform, and as a result it made James uncomfortable. Even if it was tailored to perfection.

"Indeed." Said Amina. "Crown Prince Alixan, Warden of the Southern Lands, Caretaker of the Griffin's tooth, and...." She sighed. "All around nuisance." She said with a smile.

"Crown Prince?" James wondered. "So that'd make him the next in line for the throne?"

"Yes." She answered.

"Is that why we have to meet him?" He asked.

"Only a small part." She replied. "I have to meet him either way, General to General, so that we can organize the defense of the southern gap." He head popped over her changing wall as she rested her chin on it. "But also yes. It'll save us a trip post wedding. Otherwise we'd have to travel down there to display ourselves to him and his court."

"Gotcha." He said. "And are we going to have to do that for your sisters too?" He didn't mention that, in their time together, he'd actually learned startlingly little about her siblings. Minus Artair, who he felt he knew TOO MUCH about.

"Terina yes, though she's just a quick trip back to Jadesport. Ana will probably come to the wedding. If she doesn't, she wont expect us to come visit her. She lives overseas."

"You have a sister in Jadesport?" James asked, surprised. "Why didn't we visit her when we were there?"

"Because she usually ISN'T in Jadesport." Amina answered. "She's usually out on her ship, running around, doing everything just shy of piracy." She said with a laugh.

"What, is she the family Admiral?" He asked as he tried to remember how the tie was supposed to go.

"No. She's the leader of the Merchant Fleet." Amina replied as she stepped out and grabbed her sword off of its rack. "She leads the negotiations with all the other nations we trade with by sea."

"Oh." James said with a nod. "Cool."

"Yes. The fact that it keeps her and father from having to butt heads too often is, I'm guessing, the main reason she likes the job." She said as she cinched her belt tight. She looked at James in the new uniform. "That looks a lot better than the one from before." She said.

James let the tie go for a moment and looked down at himself.

"Ya think?" He asked. "Still feels weird wearing a bunch of officer stuff." He said as he put on the round hat and then twisted a bit. "They got the measurements spot on though."

"It looks quite dashing on you." She said as she placed the belt over her shoulder that would hold her shield. "I still don't understand how its a soldier's uniform though. Odd that your people did away with armor."

"Again, only for ceremonial purposes." He said with a hint of sarcasm as he finally got the tie right.

"How do I look?" She asked as she stepped out in her full armor.

He looked over and smiled.

"Hon." He started. "That's hot enough that under other circumstances I'd say we should show up thirty minutes late." He replied with a grin. "But honestly, it'd probably take that thirty minutes just to take all that off."

She gave him a devilish grin. "Please." She said. "I can doff my armor faster than that."

James loosened his tie. "Fine, I'll take that bet. But you're helping me get this damn tie right afterwords."

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(Writer's note: I'm not putting a pancake section here. I might later. But I'm actually writing this on a break at work, so for now just deal with it. Use your IMAGINATION.)

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Amina won the bet. But they still ended up showing up nearly an hour late.

Luckily for them, the prince's arrival had been delayed by the winter weather, so he was only just arriving as they got there.

Amina took her spot next to her father, who looked at her with mild anger. James fell in between her and Kela.

Kela sniffed a bit, then raised an eyebrow.

"Really?" She asked under her breath.

"What?" James asked, also whispering.

"You're nearly an hour late." She replied. "For that?"

"You can smell that?" He asked.

"That, and you're walking funny." She said with a shake of her head.

James stretched his left leg a little bit.

"Fuckin calf cramped up. Can't help that." He said. He could feel the blush on his face. "Besides, it's just her brother. Don't even know what all the ceremony is for. Never did all this for Amina returning to the castle." He said while gesturing to everyone standing around. There were a few horn blowers near the castle entrance.

"It's been five years since he's been back. It's a meeting of two Generals." She answered. "Oh yeah. And he's the CROWN PRINCE." She practically hissed at him under her breath. "It's a touch different."

"Yeah, sure." James said sarcastically.

"You two done?" The King asked while glaring at them past Amina.

James and Kela both straightened up immediately.

"Sorry your highness." James replied. The King just huffed and turned back.

The doors creaked open just as he did. A gust of cold winter air blew in, scattering snow across the entry way. The horn blowers piped up three loud blasts.

"Crown Prince Alixan!" A crier announced. "Warden of the Southern Lands, Caretaker of the Griffin's tooth, Envoy to the Orcragg, and General of the southern armies in their defense against the Meridian Theocracy!" The crier finished.

As the crier announced the last word a massive griffin strode into the room and stopped. It was easily the largest one James had ever seen at nearly ten feet tall. It's front half looked like some kind raven, though its beak was hooked like a bird of prey. The rear half was something akin to a cheetah, though with significantly more muscle, and two tails.

Off of it stepped a man who looked like the spitting image of Artair, though with lighter blonde hair that ran down past his shoulders and a dark tan. The other major difference was that he was nearly seven feet tall, and significantly more muscled. He wore a set of black leather riding armor with long black feathers, likely from his griffin, along the shoulders.

"Holy hell." James muttered to himself as he looked up at the prince.

Gixelle did say there was giant blood on their mother's side. James recalled.

The prince turned to regard the King and the other people next to him. James saw the King smile up at his son. Amina had a smirk on her face. Kela, curiously, looked uncomfortable under the prince's gaze.

Wonder what that's about? James wondered to himself.

Then the prince looked at him. He seemed to size him up, looking at his uniform and the sword hanging from his belt. Then back at his face. James noticed that the tall man's eyes were an incredibly light shade of brown that almost looked like gold or amber.

"So." The Prince said after a moment. His voice was deep and booming. "I take it that this is the 'Summoned Hero' that I've been told stole my sister's heart." He smirked a bit. "Interesting." Then he turned towards his family members. "Good to see you again little sister." He said to Amina before patting her on the top of her head. Oddly, Amina smiled at the gesture. "Father. It's been far too long."

He bent down low and wrapped King Farrick in an embrace that the King returned with gusto.

"That it has my son." The King replied as they broke the hug. "Now come. We must feast. We have much to discuss." He said as he turned and slapped the prince on the shoulder.

"Where's Arty at?" The prince wondered. "Off being a miscreant somewhere like usual?"

And just like that the whole "welcoming ceremony" was over. James wondered why he'd even been asked to attend, much less get dressed up for it. The whole thing had lasted barely five minutes once the prince had arrived.

"Is that it?" He asked Kela. Amina was only a few steps behind her brother and father as they walked and was asking nearly as many questions as the King. "Was that the whole thing?"

Kela just shrugged. "Royal families." She said. "No matter how humble they may be, they're still all about ceremony."

Then she joined the procession of people walking toward the dining hall, gesturing for James to follow.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ucmgiq/wait_is_this_just_gate_134/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (133/?)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (132/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: If it's not from the Existential region of France, than it's just sparkling horror.

Enjoy.

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James spent nearly four hours talking with his family.

The General didn't keep the doorway open that whole time. The techs on the Earth side sent some more testing supplies through. James sent a few more of the mice, unsuccessfully once again, for them to test on. More blood samples were sent through one at a time. Veliry's sample popped as soon as it entered the earth side, sending piping hot blood spraying all over the floor.

But James was just happy to see his brother and his mom.

He introduced them to King Farrick. His mom needled the man with questions about James's living conditions. The King read the translated questions and answered as many of them as he could. But eventually an aide alerted the King that his presence was needed for some official matters, so the King excused himself. He gave a slight bow to the camera and complimented Mrs. Choi on raising such a capable son. Then he left.

Then James introduced them to Steve. Joey had been practically vibrating with anticipation, his eyes constantly darting from James's face to Amina's then, almost always, they would settle on Steve's confused and lounging form. James clicked his tongue at Steve and the massive Drake lifted up, moved over, and positioned its head right above James and Amina. James scratched the fur on the bottom of Steve's neck as the giant lizard sniffed at the olive green box that was the communication hub. After a moment he huffed and proceeded to lay his head down on the ground, forcing James and Amina to move out of the way. James simply rested his leg on Steve's forehead. The drake seemed not to even notice.

Joey had all the questions this time. James answered each one. How big was Steve? Could he breath fire? Could James make him breath fire? What did he eat? How fast could James go when riding him? All these and more. James smiled as he saw his little brother's fascination with his companion and mount.

James explained the "misunderstanding" that had led to him getting Steve. Explained how it had gotten him into Clan Drakrid. He carefully explained the tattoo to his mother. She was clearly upset by the idea. But she didn't say anything. She didn't want to ruin the "reunion" as it were. Joey thought the tattoo was awesome.

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But it was still bad news.

She took it well. It was clear that the idea of James never being able to return hurt her. But she was happy to know what was going on, once and for all. And most importantly she was just happy to know that he was alive. And not just alive, but thriving, healthy (minus whatever change

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Then James's mom told him she loved him, with tears on her eyes, and told him how proud she was that he was doing so amazingly for his situation. James struggled not to cry too, and promised that he'd do everything he could to get back to see them both in person. Even if it was only temporary.

Then the General interjected by mentioning how the Communication hub needed some down time to recharge and the line was cut a few seconds later.

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Outside of the tent there were several people with weapons arguing about it. It knew that much. After all, it could understand them.

It had spent the short sled ride from where it had emerged to this camp nearby. The "Sergeant" as Deeny had called him, and the healer had both given "Roylan" a once over and had both agreed that it wasn't Roylan anymore. That it was something else.

It hadn't confirmed or denied this. After all it didn't really understand the notion of identities. It only new that in this form, different bodies had different controlling entities. Or rather, they were their own controlling entities. And after spending the sled ride figuring out how to move its individual limbs and control its separate,

typically automatic, bodily functions, It had to admit that that was impressive. These forms were startlingly complex to control. There were numerous redundant structures and more than a few structures that It couldn't even determine a use for. So it left those functions dormant.

Apparently though, one of them had been the respiratory system, and its lack of function had caused noticeable distress amongst the creatures around it. The damage it had accidentally incurred on the left eye was another thing that they'd noticed. Its movements, odd and jilted due to Its unfamiliarity with them were the thing that had sealed their opinion of it.

And now It was tied up, and being questioned by these.... people?

They asked It where it came from. What had happened to it? Why was it acting so oddly? Was it Roylan? If so, why hadn't it reported in in months? Why didn't it breath. What had happened to its eye?

All these and more.

And It answered them. But they didn't understand Its answers.

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They'd grown violent with It several times. But they'd never actually harmed It. It wondered if that was because of Its body. Who the body had once belonged to.

It didn't matter.

Eventually a massive blond haired man, who towered over everyone else, stepped into the tent.

It dove into Roylan's brain for information, since this creature was clearly of some importance.

"Gen....Rull." It said awkwardly.

The large man stared at It.

"What are ya?" The large man asked.

Its good eye rolled back in its head, then rolled back around from the other side to look at the General. If he was disgusted by the eye's movement, he didn't show it. Not that that had been Its goal, It had simply wanted to look at itself.

"I am.... Roylan." It answered.

"No yer bloody not." He answered. "Roylan has been missing for damn near to nine months now. And after certain.... other... circumstances we had to assume that he'd either been killed. Or else thrown into one of the patches of the blight." The large man took a knee on the other side of

the table and looked It in the eye. "So I'll ask again. What in the hells are ya?"

It pondered the question for a moment.

After thinking for a while, and diving into Roylan's brain for different words that might fit, it responded.

"I am... a... warning." It said.

"A warning from who? And about what." The General asked.

"From who?" It wondered. "From no one. From nowhere. From beyond."

The General looked at it curiously.

"Beyond where?" He asked.

It pointed back the direction it had been brought from.

The General followed the direction it pointed, then seemed to realize what it meant.

"On the other side of the blight?" He asked, a look of disbelief on his face.

It thought for a second. Then nodded, Its head jerking almost mechanically up and down.

"That's impossible."

"It is not." It replied. "For I am here. And I need to speak with whoever is in charge of this world."

"This world?" The General mused with a light laugh. "Aint nobody in charge of this world. Not the whole world anyways."

"I assure you that there is." It retorted, drawing a scowl from the General. "But if you don't know them, than I shall have to find them myself."

Its hands moved suddenly. And the General realized that it had somehow gotten out of its bindings. In fact, he didn't see any bindings. One of its hands touched the table and the table seemed to blink out of existence. The General shot up to his feet.

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Then it had touched his arm with one of its hands.

The spot it touched went.... well it didn't really go anything. Not hot. Not cold. There was no pain. It just seemed to stop having any sensation at all. He jumped back and attempted to grab his arm with his other hand.

The hand met only air.

He looked down and saw that his arm was missing just past the elbow. There was no blood. He still didn't feel anything. No sensation at all. It was as if the arm beyond that point had simply ceased to be.

Then he saw his hand on the ground at the things feet.

There was no blood from that either. The fingers were twitching spastically.

By now his soldiers were already flooding into the room. He watched as one of them attempted to grab the... creature... like he had. Its hand reached out and touched the man in the chest. He saw the middle of the man's chest simply... disappear. Like the table had. Again, no blood. The man simply stiffened with shock, then fell over dead.

General Sigbert looked down at his hand. He clenched his fists in anger, and when he did his hand matched it.

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He looked back up in time to see one of his men attempt to run the thing through with their sword.

At first he'd thought it was successful. That the man had managed to actually impale the thing. But then the man's hand guard had gone into the creatures stomach too. Then the man's arms. The confused soldier jumped back in fear and shock. His arms were gone where he'd touched the creature. The young man fell down screaming in fear.

For the first time in years. Decades even. Sigbert felt fear too.

The creature looked at him with its one good eye. Sigbert felt his heart grow cold.

The eye turned back around like it had before. Then it fixated back on him.

"Tell whoever you believe is in charge that I am looking for the person who is actually in charge. And also that I AM a warning." It said.

"A warning of what?" Sigbert asked as he grabbed his detached hand and cradled it to his chest. He began backing away as the thing walked toward the tent flap.

"By the time THEY know. I imagine that it will already be occurring." It said as it touched the side of the tent. It looked skyward, as if looking at the stars.

The canvas that the tent was made of vanished and suddenly It WAS looking at the stars.

"Yes." It agreed with itself. "By the time YOU deliver any message. It will already be here."

Then it began walking. Sigbert was left in the cold, holding his own hand, not noticing that it was holding back.

He should have ordered his men to stand down. They continued to attack it for a few minutes as it continued to walk through the snow, its mostly naked form ignorant of the cold. But he was too scared to give orders. After a few minutes the figured out that they couldn't hurt it and gave it a wide berth even without his command.

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/ubu0rv/wait_is_this_just_gate_133/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (132/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u8wega/wait_is_this_just_gate_131/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: If it's not from the Existential region of France, than it's just sparkling horror.

Enjoy.

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James spent nearly four hours talking with his family.

The General didn't keep the doorway open that whole time. The techs on the Earth side sent some more testing supplies through. James sent a few more of the mice, unsuccessfully once again, for them to test on. More blood samples were sent through one at a time. Veliry's sample popped as soon as it entered the earth side, sending piping hot blood spraying all over the floor.

But James was just happy to see his brother and his mom.

He introduced them to King Farrick. His mom needled the man with questions about James's living conditions. The King read the translated questions and answered as many of them as he could. But eventually an aide alerted the King that his presence was needed for some official matters, so the King excused himself. He gave a slight bow to the camera and complimented Mrs. Choi on raising such a capable son. Then he left.

Then James introduced them to Steve. Joey had been practically vibrating with anticipation, his eyes constantly darting from James's face to Amina's then, almost always, they would settle on Steve's confused and lounging form. James clicked his tongue at Steve and the massive Drake lifted up, moved over, and positioned its head right above James and Amina. James scratched the fur on the bottom of Steve's neck as the giant lizard sniffed at the olive green box that was the communication hub. After a moment he huffed and proceeded to lay his head down on the ground, forcing James and Amina to move out of the way. James simply rested his leg on Steve's forehead. The drake seemed not to even notice.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (131/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u8760y/wait_is_this_just_gate_130/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Anime Action sequence/training montage GO!

Also, wholesomeness.

Enjoy

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James slid under the bolt of fire and spun, pivoting on his right foot as he brought the sword into a swing.

Amina's blade batted it aside as she sidestepped out of its reach.

James's sword pulled his arm towards him and he rolled sideways while lowering. Another firebolt flew just past his back and the Mage's Blade attempted to pull him towards where Veliry was hovering.

But instead James leapt up, continuing the twist into a sideways roll that saw him narrowly miss Kela's padded axe head.

His right hand lashed out, and his clothes fluttered with wind magic as his chain weapon lashed out to grab the axe as it continued its arc. But he had to pull his hand back, relenting on the attack as Amina's sword swung for the hand holding it. Instead it ended up hitting the chain itself with a loud clank.

James attempted to get the chain to wrap over her blade instead, but then his sword tried to pull him off into another spin. He had to let go of the chain as Amina began to throw it off, and let the sword lead him into its attack, swinging at the incoming fire attack from behind him.

The blade drank in the heat and magic of the incoming projectile and James fought the blade's will to redirect it into blocking Kela's incoming axe.

He saw Amina coming at him from the corner of his eye. He jumped up a little and kicked Kela in chest plate. It did little to hurt the armored werewolf, but it also wasn't meant to. He was just using her as a springboard. He leapt up over Amina's charge and as he flew he focused his magical energy. His blade began tugging at it's wielding hand.

But James had already expected that.

As soon as he hit the ground he brought his free hand up like he was uppercutting someone. A pillar of earth flew up in front of him just in time to block another fire attack. Then he punched the casting hand forward and sent the pillar flying toward where Amina had turned back to attack again.

Naturally she spun to the side, dodging the attack easily. But James was right behind the flying mass of dirt and stone, using it as cover as he moved.

Kela braced her shoulder and slammed through the mass. But James simply rolled past her and grabbed the handle of his chain as he recovered his feet. The second he did he rolled again and sprang off of the ground and into the air again, following the pull of his sword and reading its intent.

Veliry's eyes widened as she saw James leap up into the air. She knew he could jump nearly as high as Amina could now. But it was still a surprise to see him take to it so quickly. As a reflex she flew backwards and rapidly shot another bolt of fire at him. But all it did was keep him from hitting her. His blade devoured the attack like it had before.

James swirled the chain around himself as he fell, ensuring that he wouldn't be attacked immediately when he landed. But Kela wasn't far from it.

To James's surprise, she swung her axe in a downward chop right onto his chain. Once it had been deflected downward she grabbed a handful of the chain in her free hand, gripping the links tightly. Then she began pulling.

The amount of chain she had a hold of kept James from being able to keep them moving cohesively. So he fell back on old tactics. Ambush the ambush. He charged forward, past her, and began wrapping his length of chain around her.

Star Wars style you tall motherfucker! He thought to himself.

But he only got around her once before she realized what was happening. She spun to match his run, and undid all the work he'd done.

Then he was reminded that his fiance was in this fight too.

He'd still been running around Kela, with his newfound speed, when a booted foot had flashed out in front of his legs.

James had a split second to think. *Aaaw, dick move babe.*

Then he was tumbling.

He managed to keep his sword away from his body. But he lost the chain handle as he rolled over several times and skidded to a halt on his side.

"Owwww." He moaned as he spit out a clump of dirt that had made it past his helmet's visor.

When he rolled over to pick himself up the three women were standing, or in Veliry's case hovering, over him. Each of them was poised to attack.

James let out a sigh. "Yield." He said forlornly.

Kela grinned as she reached out to him. He let her help him up.

"You're getting better." She said. "Especially considering that you only learned about your new abilities last week."

James dusted himself off as he looked up. He removed his helmet and found a clump of grass sticking in the visor slits.

"That was quite good." Amina agreed. "You lasted nearly three minutes before we got you."

"Yeah." James agreed. "Too bad I didn't get any hits in."

"That wasn't the objective though." Amina reminded him.

"Yeah I know. Just wanted to." He said. "Still.... Being able to move like that." He grinned. "It's pretty damn exhilarating. I still find it hard to believe that I can jump like that." He admitted.

Vickers watched the interaction from where he was in the training yard. He'd watched the fight too, kind of. But he was mostly focused on his own training. Watching Choi learn how to be a discount Avenger wasn't going to help him figure out how to gain his own powers.

He went back to punching the dummy that was in front of him. It wasn't as good as a punching bag. But the straw and leather armor was close.

He was stronger here, he realized. He hadn't noticed it before. But now that it had been pointed out he could see it.

The dummy, with all its gear, had to weigh at least eighty pounds. He could lift that normally even without any magical wonkiness in his blood. But it was easier than it should have been.

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Oh. That's why they look familiar. James thought.

"I know. Pretty cool right? I'mma give you a present bud." He said before stepping up to the portal and tossing the helmet through. Then he looked at the camera. "Hey mom." He said before pulling Amina closer. "So I hear that you're having trouble believing the General's story. Don't blame you. But lets talk. I got a lot to tell you."

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"Okay mijo." She said after a few seconds.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (131/?)

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Writer's note: Anime Action sequence/training montage GO!

Also, wholesomeness.

Enjoy

\~

James slid under the bolt of fire and spun, pivoting on his right foot as he brought the sword into a swing.

Amina's blade batted it aside as she sidestepped out of its reach.

James's sword pulled his arm towards him and he rolled sideways while lowering. Another firebolt flew just past his back and the Mage's Blade attempted to pull him towards where Veliry was hovering.

But instead James leapt up, continuing the twist into a sideways roll that saw him narrowly miss Kela's padded axe head.

His right hand lashed out, and his clothes fluttered with wind magic as his chain weapon lashed out to grab the axe as it continued its arc. But he had to pull his hand back, relenting on the attack as Amina's sword swung for the hand holding it. Instead it ended up hitting the chain itself with a loud clank.

James attempted to get the chain to wrap over her blade instead, but then his sword tried to pull him off into another spin. He had to let go of the chain as Amina began to throw it off, and let the sword lead him into its attack, swinging at the incoming fire attack from behind him.

The blade drank in the heat and magic of the incoming projectile and James fought the blade's will to redirect it into blocking Kela's incoming axe.

He saw Amina coming at him from the corner of his eye. He jumped up a little and kicked Kela in chest plate. It did little to hurt the armored werewolf, but it also wasn't meant to. He was just using her as a springboard. He leapt up over Amina's charge and as he flew he focused his magical energy. His blade began tugging at it's wielding hand.

But James had already expected that.

As soon as he hit the ground he brought his free hand up like he was uppercutting someone. A pillar of earth flew up in front of him just in time to block another fire attack. Then he punched the casting hand forward and sent the pillar flying toward where Amina had turned back to attack again.

Naturally she spun to the side, dodging the attack easily. But James was right behind the flying mass of dirt and stone, using it as cover as he moved.

Kela braced her shoulder and slammed through the mass. But James simply rolled past her and grabbed the handle of his chain as he recovered his feet. The second he did he rolled again and sprang off of the ground and into the air again, following the pull of his sword and reading its intent.

Veliry's eyes widened as she saw James leap up into the air. She knew he could jump nearly as high as Amina could now. But it was still a surprise to see him take to it so quickly. As a reflex she flew backwards and rapidly shot another bolt of fire at him. But all it did was keep him from hitting her. His blade devoured the attack like it had before.

James swirled the chain around himself as he fell, ensuring that he wouldn't be attacked immediately when he landed. But Kela wasn't far from it.

To James's surprise, she swung her axe in a downward chop right onto his chain. Once it had been deflected downward she grabbed a handful of the chain in her free hand, gripping the links tightly. Then she began pulling.

The amount of chain she had a hold of kept James from being able to keep them moving cohesively. So he fell back on old tactics. Ambush the ambush. He charged forward, past her, and began wrapping his length of chain around her.

Star Wars style you tall motherfucker! He thought to himself.

But he only got around her once before she realized what was happening. She spun to match his run, and undid all the work he'd done.

Then he was reminded that his fiance was in this fight too.

He'd still been running around Kela, with his newfound speed, when a booted foot had flashed out in front of his legs.

James had a split second to think. *Aaaw, dick move babe.*

Then he was tumbling.

He managed to keep his sword away from his body. But he lost the chain handle as he rolled over several times and skidded to a halt on his side.

"Owwww." He moaned as he spit out a clump of dirt that had made it past his helmet's visor.

When he rolled over to pick himself up the three women were standing, or in Veliry's case hovering, over him. Each of them was poised to attack.

James let out a sigh. "Yield." He said forlornly.

Kela grinned as she reached out to him. He let her help him up.

"You're getting better." She said. "Especially considering that you only learned about your new abilities last week."

James dusted himself off as he looked up. He removed his helmet and found a clump of grass sticking in the visor slits.

"That was quite good." Amina agreed. "You lasted nearly three minutes before we got you."

"Yeah." James agreed. "Too bad I didn't get any hits in."

"That wasn't the objective though." Amina reminded him.

"Yeah I know. Just wanted to." He said. "Still.... Being able to move like that." He grinned. "It's pretty damn exhilarating. I still find it hard to believe that I can jump like that." He admitted.

Vickers watched the interaction from where he was in the training yard. He'd watched the fight too, kind of. But he was mostly focused on his own training. Watching Choi learn how to be a discount Avenger wasn't going to help him figure out how to gain his own powers.

He went back to punching the dummy that was in front of him. It wasn't as good as a punching bag. But the straw and leather armor was close.

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It emerged from the patch naked, and landed in the snow with a flop.

It lay there for several minutes as it formed its mind.

COLD

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SIGHT..... DARK.... WHITE..... SNOW?

That was the next thing its..... mind(?) noticed as it came to be.

Well. It thought. And it did think. That was new. *The snow explains the cold. So this is consciousness?*

It pondered this. Its body lay motionless as it did.

Oh. We should probably figure out how to make this thing move.

It's arm jerked. That was confusing since it had wanted the eyes to turn.

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NOISE.... MOVEMENT.... GETTING LOUDER..... CLOSER.

Its head slowly rotated toward the source of the noise. Its one remaining good eye strained to see, though not enough to damage itself.

"Who goes there!?" Shouted a voice. The creature who owned the voice was holding some kind of light source above and behind their head. Their breath put up little puffs of steam in the cold air.

That would be useful to have. Wouldn't have to risk damaging the eyes.

It dug around in the brain again and looked for the appropriate response to the words.

"Hhhhhhhh." It hissed through clenched teeth and still closed lips.

The light creature froze, then slowly turned the light in their direction.

"What was that?" They asked.

Damn. Work voice.

"Hhhhhhe." It said again. It focused, then its lips pulled back from each other in what could almost pass as a mocking grin. It opened its mouth awkwardly. "HHhhhheeeeeelp." It said at last.

It heard footsteps crunching through the snow.

Going to have to try that once we've got this figured out.

"Hhhhelp." It repeated as the creature got closer now. It was moving faster now.

Finally the light bearing creature got close enough to see, and be seen, by It.

"Hhhhelp." It said once more.

"Roylan?" It asked, a look of curiosity and fear on its face. Not that IT knew what those were yet. "Roylan is that you?"

"Hhelp." It said. "Help.... Roy...lan." It added, assuming that that was its body's former name.

The creature pulled the long piece of cloth off of its shoulders and draped them over It.

"Stay roight here Roylan." It said. It smelled like something sharp and foul. But It decided to ignore the bad smell.

The light carrying creature turned and began running back the way it had come.

"GO GET THE CAPTAIN! I JUST FOUND ROYLAN! HE'S HALF FROZE AND ONLY IN HIS UNDERBRITCHES!" The light creature yelled.

Another creature, further away, yelled something back.

"JUST GO GET THE BLEEDIN' CAP'N!" The light bearing creature replied. "AND BRING A HEALER!"

I wonder if this is going to help THE PLAN or not. It wondered as the light carrying creature came back to help it.

The light bearing creature began to help wrap it in the clothe a bit better. Then it began pulling something from the pouch on its belt, and dug around for a bit. Eventually it found some sticks and piled them up.

"It's alright Roylan. I gotcha. Deeny's gotcha." The light bearing creature.... Deeny..... said as it poured some kind of liquid on the sticks. "We'll getcha warmed up." Deeny said as it looked It..... no.... Roylan in the face.

When Deeny looked at "Roylan" he froze.

"Roylan" looked back at Deeny with its one good eye.

"What happened to your eye?" Deeny asked. Then he looked down a bit. "And why aint you breathing?"

It dug into Roylan's brain again. But Roylan had no information on what to do in this kind of situation.

"Help Roylan." It said.

Deeny backed up slowly. He pulled the lantern from where it was held above his pack and touched one of the sticks to its flame, lighting the oil he'd put on the stick. Then threw the stick into the bundle, creating a small flame. But he didn't come closer, and as he set the lantern back on its hook, his hand fell to the grip of his sword.

"Stay there." Deeny said sternly. "Help's on its way."

Deeny didn't take his eyes off the thing that had once been one of his fellow guards.

"Roylan" watched Deeny with curiosity, and continued figuring out how to move.

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"Who goes there!?" Shouted a voice. The creature who owned the voice was holding some kind of light source above and behind their head. Their breath put up little puffs of steam in the cold air.

That would be useful to have. Wouldn't have to risk damaging the eyes.

It dug around in the brain again and looked for the appropriate response to the words.

"Hhhhhhhh." It hissed through clenched teeth and still closed lips.

The light creature froze, then slowly turned the light in their direction.

"What was that?" They asked.

Damn. Work voice.

"Hhhhhhe." It said again. It focused, then its lips pulled back from each other in what could almost pass as a mocking grin. It opened its mouth awkwardly. "HHhhhheeeeeelp." It said at last.

It heard footsteps crunching through the snow.

Going to have to try that once we've got this figured out.

"Hhhhelp." It repeated as the creature got closer now. It was moving faster now.

Finally the light bearing creature got close enough to see, and be seen, by It.

"Hhhhelp." It said once more.

"Roylan?" It asked, a look of curiosity and fear on its face. Not that IT knew what those were yet. "Roylan is that you?"

"Hhelp." It said. "Help.... Roy...lan." It added, assuming that that was its body's former name.

The creature pulled the long piece of cloth off of its shoulders and draped them over It.

"Stay roight here Roylan." It said. It smelled like something sharp and foul. But It decided to ignore the bad smell.

The light carrying creature turned and began running back the way it had come.

"GO GET THE CAPTAIN! I JUST FOUND ROYLAN! HE'S HALF FROZE AND ONLY IN HIS UNDERBRITCHES!" The light creature yelled.

Another creature, further away, yelled something back.

"JUST GO GET THE BLEEDIN' CAP'N!" The light bearing creature replied. "AND BRING A HEALER!"

I wonder if this is going to help THE PLAN or not. It wondered as the light carrying creature came back to help it.

The light bearing creature began to help wrap it in the clothe a bit better. Then it began pulling something from the pouch on its belt, and dug around for a bit. Eventually it found some sticks and piled them up.

"It's alright Roylan. I gotcha. Deeny's gotcha." The light bearing creature.... Deeny..... said as it poured some kind of liquid on the sticks. "We'll getcha warmed up." Deeny said as it looked It..... no.... Roylan in the face.

When Deeny looked at "Roylan" he froze.

"Roylan" looked back at Deeny with its one good eye.

"What happened to your eye?" Deeny asked. Then he looked down a bit. "And why aint you breathing?"

It dug into Roylan's brain again. But Roylan had no information on what to do in this kind of situation.

"Help Roylan." It said.

Deeny backed up slowly. He pulled the lantern from where it was held above his pack and touched one of the sticks to its flame, lighting the oil he'd put on the stick. Then threw the stick into the bundle, creating a small flame. But he didn't come closer, and as he set the lantern back on its hook, his hand fell to the grip of his sword.

"Stay there." Deeny said sternly. "Help's on its way."

Deeny didn't take his eyes off the thing that had once been one of his fellow guards.

"Roylan" watched Deeny with curiosity, and continued figuring out how to move.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u8wega/wait_is_this_just_gate_131/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (129/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u6kqp3/wait_is_this_just_gate_128/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: This is the, "protagonist just realized he's a superhero, now he needs to test his powers" scene.

Enjoy.

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"Is he just gonna stand there looking constipated?" Vickers asked.

"He's going to do something." Kela responded. "Why are you here?"

"Boredom mostly. Nobody will tell me anything about anything except for you guys. And even that info is sparing." Vickers responded.

The two of them stood near the training ring watching James concentrate. Wrapped around his chest was his chain weapon. He had the handle in his right hand, and his left hand was held just a few inches away from the spiked ending of it.

He'd moved it before. That wasn't the issue. What he wanted now was to move it faster, and with some force, and he also wanted to try something else. He'd been practicing for months now, albeit not as much as with his sword. But the recent revelations about his strength had allowed him to come up with some ideas.

So, he'd had Kraug set up a few training dummies in the fighting ring closest to the wall.

"He's still just standing there." Vickers said after another minute or so of James continuing to concentrate.

"Give him time. Controlling wind magic the way he does is harder than it looks." Kela replied.

"Look. I've already got a lot goin' on in here right now." James said while pointing at his temple. "I don't need a peanut gallery too. So unless you've got constructive dialogue, please shut up."

"Sir yes sir." Vickers deadpanned. James gritted his teeth at the audible sarcasm.

He felt the magic welling up out of his hand and the chain began to clatter with movement. His clothes began to flutter the way they always did with wind magic.

The chain began to uncoil from around his chest.

He couldn't see it, but Vickers was standing up straighter and watching him with curiosity.

The chain unspooled to its full length and James began slowly spinning it, forming a wind magic enhanced vortex pattern above him. He stepped

forward and lashed the blade down, then flicked it to the side at the last second.

The vortex crashed down onto one of the training dummies, then pulled tight, sinking the spikes of the last handful of links into the wood and metal flesh of the dummy.

James pulled back while spinning the handle again and the chain ripped the dummy up off the ground and pulled it past James's left shoulder. It smashed into another dummy with a loud crash. James jerked the chain up to the sky again, leaving the battered bits of wood and old armor where they'd fallen.

The wad of chain slammed into another dummy like a fist, sending it skidding backward, and began wrapping around it.

This time James used his newly discovered strength to leap into the air, easily clearing ten feet, towards the dummy. At the same time he pulled up on the chain and brought himself crashing down on top of it. The space where James's feet landed cleared itself of chain links at the last second and he ended up bringing his heels down on the dummy's chest plate, denting it deeply.

He spun the handle of the chain over his head and around himself like he'd seen lasso users do in videos before. The chain began spinning around him, the spiked links scoring the armor of the dummy in dozens of places, even as they formed a metal wall around him.

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He leaped again, higher this time. At the apex of the jump he whipped the chain ahead of him and watched it race toward one of the lamp posts that was on top of the wall. It wrapped around it several times before biting. It was pulling itself taught, roiling around the post like a boa constrictor that had snagged a prey animal, and pulling the slack out of the space between him and the post in the process.

Then James made a mistake.

Fuck yeah! It fuckin worked! He thought to himself.

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Instead the chain lost all of its tension. And when James fell. He simply plummeted, chain handle still in his hand.

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As James picked himself up from among the debris of the destroyed dummies and the length of chain that fell around him. He heard Vickers laugh for the first time since meeting the man.

"Are you okay?" Kela asked, having run over as soon as he'd begun falling.

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"No." He said weakly. "I think I broke my pride."

"If it's any consolation." She said as she held her hand out. He took it. "It was going quite well until that last bit."

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"I know right?" He said as he began walking toward Steve's pen. "Real Lord of the Rings, Doctor Seuss, shit huh?"

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u8760y/wait_is_this_just_gate_130/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (129/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u6kowb/wait_is_this_just_gate_128/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

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Wait, is this just GATE? (128/?)

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*Writer's note: Would blood cells structured like this actually work? Fuck no. I actually based these on a writing assignment I did in one of

my nursing courses that actually embraced a bit of Sci-Fi schenanigans. It was all written KNOWING that none of it would actually work IRL. All the species on our planet evolved to have similar cell structures for a reason. Because it works.*

So, quit nit picking the science of a world where magic exists. Or don't. Y'all's arguments entertain me a bit.

Enjoy.

\~

"So." Said the technician on the Earth side of the display, a Dr. Fincher. "There's not many easy ways to explain the difference between our blood samples, other than to say that the fundamental SHAPE of our blood cells is different." He had an awkwardly deep voice for such a small man, and just a hint of an English accent. "To put things as easily as possible." He tapped the screen on his side and two images popped up. "Our blood, which you can see on the left, is round. It's like a doughnut or an inter-tube or something. You guys don't have those I'm betting." He fiddled with something and the image of the Earth style blood cell moved sluggishly from one side to the other. "They're also more or less immobile on their own. They don't have a locomotion of their own and just kind of... go with the flow, so to speak."

He looked directly into the camera and forced a smile.

"Your blood on the other hand, as you can see in the right hand image, is. Well.... it's triangular... kind of." He tapped a button and a 3D rendering appeared in the place of the image of the Earth blood. "It's actually closer to a three pronged spiral shape. With each prong being slightly curved in the same direction. Almost like a boat propeller or the fins on a missile or something." He tapped something else and the real image of the blood cell began to spin slowly, and make its way across the screen. "They also DO have a limited motion. We think it's some kind of limited Magnus effect. Though we don't currently know why it happens. Also, we aren't certain, but we think the three prongs might serve the same function as the divots in OUR blood cells, just three fold. It would explain why-"

"Doc." James interrupted. "Explain it like you're teaching someone with an incomplete medical degree and a couple of high school students who are obsessed with street magic." He said, shaking the Doctor out of his rant."

Veliry and Marcos both bristled at the comparison. But couldn't deny that they didn't know what the Doctor had been saying.

"Right. Sorry." Dr. Fincher replied.

He pulled up the images of the two blood cells.

"To put it simply. Our blood cells are designed to carry oxygen and carbon dioxide through our body to different organs and function

systems." He shrugged. "And it's pretty good at it. But they're simple. They depend on our heart and blood pressure to move, and they only carry a limited amount of either."

He gestured at the Petravian style blood cell.

"Yours are very complex. They seem to carry MORE than triple the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide as ours do. And they can move on their own, albeit slowly. But it's still faster than our blood cells can move on their own, mainly because they don't." Dr. Fincher said with just a hint of pride, though James didn't know why. "To put it simply; we've never seen blood cells like yours."

"And, why does this result in our blood reacting so violently to your side of the doorway?" Veliry asked. "Also, what does it have to do with the differences in Captain Choi's, and Chief Vickers' blood samples?"

Dr. Fincher winced a bit at the question.

"Well. That's the thing." He began. "We..... don't know yet. We BELIEVE that your bodies have evolved this in CONJUNCTION with your worlds magical nature. It may also be a result of all the different humanoid species of your world genetically intermingling throughout history." He lowered his head a bit. "But we can't know that for sure without further testing. Typically we'd want a live person to run through a series of tests. But that's not currently feasible. At least not until we can figure out HOW to get someone through the door alive. And preferably without their blood, and who knows what else, exploding out of them the second they arrive. Until then all our tests will have to be done on your side."

"And what about my blood?" James asked.

"Oh. Right." Dr. Fincher replied. "Sorry. The... um... foreign.... blood cells are just so fascinating. I completely forgot to answer the question about yours Captain Choi."

"It's all good doc." James replied with a hand wave. "But what's going on with my blood?"

"Well. Again we can't be a hundred percent certain without further testing. But our best theory so far is that your body's exposure to magic, coupled with the, seemingly, extreme physical exertions of your training. Have resulted in your blood becoming." He thought for a moment. "I don't know. Super charged? Energized? It's hard to understand really. It's like your blood cells are doing their best to imitate the.... foreign.... blood cells. But they aren't quite able to do it all the way."

He tapped on the screen and showed the footage of James's blood sample being retrieved, and how it had been practically boiling inside its vial.

"It released an incredible amount of thermal energy, and the oxygen levels inside of the vial were....well, impressive. I only wish that the princess's vial had survived, we might have been able to see something similar."

"So what you're saying..." Vickers said, speaking for the first time. "Is that a whole bunch of weird shit's happening. Really exciting weird shit that'll probably earn you guys a Nobel or something in fifty years when this stuff gets declassified." He said with a shrug. "But you don't actually KNOW anything yet?"

Dr. Fincher cringed.

"Unfortunately yes." He replied. "That's a fairly accurate summary."

"Are we in risk doc?" James asked.

"That's really anyone's guess." The doctor replied. "You look and, according to your own reports, FEEL fine. Nobody is getting sick. Which honestly surprises me given our world's history with diseases when new populations meet. And you're now capable of casting spells and running at road legal speeds." He shrugged. "As long as you're feeling okay, and don't have any negative health effects. I don't see why it would be an issue. We theorize that it's just your body adapting, with a bit of assistance from the ambient magic, to its new setting and new abilities."

"So, once again, you have no idea?" James asked, before Vickers had the chance.

The doctor winced again.

"That's another way of putting it yes." He replied.

"What happens if we do begin to have issues?" James asked.

"We don't know." Dr. Fincher replied. "If it's something mundane.... a kidney failing, or a skull fracture, or something. We might be able to send a doctor, a surgeon or something, to perform whatever procedure is necessary. This is assuming that magical healing won't fix it." He shrugged. "But outside of that. We really don't have answers. Not yet anyways."

Amina grabbed James's arm from where she was sitting next to him. He looked at her and nodded.

"Hey guys." He said to the other people in the room. "Mind giving me and Amina a minute with the doc? You know. In private."

Vickers raised an eyebrow when he looked at James. Then saw Amina's hand on his bicep, sighed, and stood up to leave. Veliry roused Marcos from the half sleep that he seemed to be in, and then pointed him at the door.

When they were alone, and the door had closed, James turned back to the camera. Dr. Fincher was on the other side still, with a curious look on his face.

"So doc." James began. "We have a... slightly more personal question to ask."

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"So." Jurl began, whispering, as he gently lifted Mela off of James's lap and placed her on his own as he sat down in the nearby chair. "Your body is undergoing some kind of... naturalization process. The likes of which scholars on both sides of the doorway are unsure of. And there's a chance that you and the princess might not be able to have children."

James sipped his beer and nodded, careful not to place it down too noisily and risk waking Tilo up. The little werepup was curled up on the couch next to him, with James's jacket as a blanket. Amina and Kela were upstairs getting the spare bedroom ready for the night. James imagined that they were probably having a very similar conversation.

"Yup." James replied in a whisper. "But don't forget that this 'naturalization' process," He nodded at Jurl. "Good term for it by the way." He said before resuming. "But it also might mean that I'm never going home again. My freaking blood might explode if I do."

"That's a lot of bad news for one day." Jurl said as he scratched Mela behind the ear.

James lifted his mug again and took a long drink from it.

"Yeah." He said after several long seconds.

"How are you doing?" Jurl asked. "How is Amina doing?"

"I don't think it's fully hit either of us yet." James admitted. "We both know it. Like... factually." He went for another drink, only to find that he was out. So he gently placed it back down. "But I don't know how far it's sunk in yet."

"Not something to look forward to." Jurl replied. "Like setting a broken finger." He held up his hand for emphasis. "It has to happen sooner or later in order to heal correctly. But it will hurt when it does."

"Yeah." James said simply as he leaned his head back on the couch and looked up at the ceiling. "Yeah. That sounds about right."

James closed his eyes and rubbed them with his hand for a moment.

"Neither of us even really realized that we wanted kids all that much." He admitted. "Not until there was a chance that we couldn't have any anyways."

"Like not realizing that you want a sweet until your parents say you can't have any?" Jurl countered.

"You're killing me with these metaphors man." James replied. "And also yes."

They sat in silence for a minute. The noise of Amina and Kela moving about upstairs, and the small chainsaw snore of Tilo beneath James's jacket the only things interrupting it.

"Just be there for each other." Jurl said after a long while. "Sometimes that's all marriage is. Just being there when they need you to be. And letting them be there for you."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (128/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u4d063/wait_is_this_just_gate_127/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Would blood cells structured like this actually work? Fuck no. I actually based these on a writing assignment I did in one of my nursing courses that actually embraced a bit of Sci-Fi schenanigans. It was all written KNOWING that none of it would actually work IRL. All the species on our planet evolved to have similar cell structures for a reason. Because it works.

So, quit nit picking the science of a world where magic exists. Or don't. Y'all's arguments entertain me a bit.

Enjoy.

PS: This is your reminder that r/GATEhouse *exists now.*

\~

"So." Said the technician on the Earth side of the display, a Dr. Fincher. "There's not many easy ways to explain the difference between our blood samples, other than to say that the fundamental SHAPE of our blood cells is different." He had an awkwardly deep voice for such a small man, and just a hint of an English accent. "To put things as easily as possible." He tapped the screen on his side and two images popped up. "Our blood, which you can see on the left, is round. It's like a doughnut or an inter-tube or something. You guys don't have those I'm betting." He fiddled with something and the image of the Earth style blood cell moved sluggishly from one side to the other. "They're also more or less immobile on their own. They don't have a locomotion of their own and just kind of... go with the flow, so to speak."

He looked directly into the camera and forced a smile.

"Your blood on the other hand, as you can see in the right hand image, is. Well.... it's triangular... kind of." He tapped a button and a 3D rendering appeared in the place of the image of the Earth blood. "It's actually closer to a three pronged spiral shape. With each prong being slightly curved in the same direction. Almost like a boat propeller or the fins on a missile or something." He tapped something else and the real image of the blood cell began to spin slowly, and make its way across the screen. "They also DO have a limited motion. We think it's some kind of limited Magnus effect. Though we don't currently know why it happens. Also, we aren't certain, but we think the three prongs might serve the same function as the divots in OUR blood cells, just three fold. It would explain why-"

"Doc." James interrupted. "Explain it like you're teaching someone with an incomplete medical degree and a couple of high school students who are obsessed with street magic." He said, shaking the Doctor out of his rant."

Veliry and Marcos both bristled at the comparison. But couldn't deny that they didn't know what the Doctor had been saying.

"Right. Sorry." Dr. Fincher replied.

He pulled up the images of the two blood cells.

"To put it simply. Our blood cells are designed to carry oxygen and carbon dioxide through our body to different organs and function systems." He shrugged. "And it's pretty good at it. But they're simple. They depend on our heart and blood pressure to move, and they only carry a limited amount of either."

He gestured at the Petravian style blood cell.

"Yours are very complex. They seem to carry MORE than triple the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide as ours do. And they can move on their own, albeit slowly. But it's still faster than our blood cells can move on their own, mainly because they don't." Dr. Fincher said with just a hint

of pride, though James didn't know why. "To put it simply; we've never seen blood cells like yours."

"And, why does this result in our blood reacting so violently to your side of the doorway?" Veliry asked. "Also, what does it have to do with the differences in Captain Choi's, and Chief Vickers' blood samples?"

Dr. Fincher winced a bit at the question.

"Well. That's the thing." He began. "We..... don't know yet. We BELIEVE that your bodies have evolved this in CONJUNCTION with your worlds magical nature. It may also be a result of all the different humanoid species of your world genetically intermingling throughout history." He lowered his head a bit. "But we can't know that for sure without further testing. Typically we'd want a live person to run through a series of tests. But that's not currently feasible. At least not until we can figure out HOW to get someone through the door alive. And preferably without their blood, and who knows what else, exploding out of them the second they arrive. Until then all our tests will have to be done on your side."

"And what about my blood?" James asked.

"Oh. Right." Dr. Fincher replied. "Sorry. The... um... foreign.... blood cells are just so fascinating. I completely forgot to answer the question about yours Captain Choi."

"It's all good doc." James replied with a hand wave. "But what's going on with my blood?"

"Well. Again we can't be a hundred percent certain without further testing. But our best theory so far is that your body's exposure to magic, coupled with the, seemingly, extreme physical exertions of your training. Have resulted in your blood becoming." He thought for a moment. "I don't know. Super charged? Energized? It's hard to understand really. It's like your blood cells are doing their best to imitate the.... foreign.... blood cells. But they aren't quite able to do it all the way."

He tapped on the screen and showed the footage of James's blood sample being retrieved, and how it had been practically boiling inside its vial.

"It released an incredible amount of thermal energy, and the oxygen levels inside of the vial were....well, impressive. I only wish that the princess's vial had survived, we might have been able to see something similar."

"So what you're saying..." Vickers said, speaking for the first time. "Is that a whole bunch of weird shit's happening. Really exciting weird shit that'll probably earn you guys a Nobel or something in fifty years when this stuff gets declassified." He said with a shrug. "But you don't actually KNOW anything yet?"

Dr. Fincher cringed.

"Unfortunately yes." He replied. "That's a fairly accurate summary."

"Are we in risk doc?" James asked.

"That's really anyone's guess." The doctor replied. "You look and, according to your own reports, FEEL fine. Nobody is getting sick. Which honestly surprises me given our world's history with diseases when new populations meet. And you're now capable of casting spells and running at road legal speeds." He shrugged. "As long as you're feeling okay, and don't have any negative health effects. I don't see why it would be an issue. We theorize that it's just your body adapting, with a bit of assistance from the ambient magic, to its new setting and new abilities."

"So, once again, you have no idea?" James asked, before Vickers had the chance.

The doctor winced again.

"That's another way of putting it yes." He replied.

"What happens if we do begin to have issues?" James asked.

"We don't know." Dr. Fincher replied. "If it's something mundane.... a kidney failing, or a skull fracture, or something. We might be able to send a doctor, a surgeon or something, to perform whatever procedure is necessary. This is assuming that magical healing won't fix it." He shrugged. "But outside of that. We really don't have answers. Not yet anyways."

Amina grabbed James's arm from where she was sitting next to him. He looked at her and nodded.

"Hey guys." He said to the other people in the room. "Mind giving me and Amina a minute with the doc? You know. In private."

Vickers raised an eyebrow when he looked at James. Then saw Amina's hand on his bicep, sighed, and stood up to leave. Veliry roused Marcos from the half sleep that he seemed to be in, and then pointed him at the door.

When they were alone, and the door had closed, James turned back to the camera. Dr. Fincher was on the other side still, with a curious look on his face.

"So doc." James began. "We have a... slightly more personal question to ask."

\----------

"So." Jurl began, whispering, as he gently lifted Mela off of James's lap and placed her on his own as he sat down in the nearby chair. "Your body is undergoing some kind of... naturalization process. The likes of which scholars on both sides of the doorway are unsure of. And there's a chance that you and the princess might not be able to have children."

James sipped his beer and nodded, careful not to place it down too noisily and risk waking Tilo up. The little werepup was curled up on the couch next to him, with James's jacket as a blanket. Amina and Kela were upstairs getting the spare bedroom ready for the night. James imagined that they were probably having a very similar conversation.

"Yup." James replied in a whisper. "But don't forget that this 'naturalization' process," He nodded at Jurl. "Good term for it by the way." He said before resuming. "But it also might mean that I'm never going home again. My freaking blood might explode if I do."

"That's a lot of bad news for one day." Jurl said as he scratched Mela behind the ear.

James lifted his mug again and took a long drink from it.

"Yeah." He said after several long seconds.

"How are you doing?" Jurl asked. "How is Amina doing?"

"I don't think it's fully hit either of us yet." James admitted. "We both know it. Like... factually." He went for another drink, only to find that he was out. So he gently placed it back down. "But I don't know how far it's sunk in yet."

"Not something to look forward to." Jurl replied. "Like setting a broken finger." He held up his hand for emphasis. "It has to happen sooner or later in order to heal correctly. But it will hurt when it does."

"Yeah." James said simply as he leaned his head back on the couch and looked up at the ceiling. "Yeah. That sounds about right."

James closed his eyes and rubbed them with his hand for a moment.

"Neither of us even really realized that we wanted kids all that much." He admitted. "Not until there was a chance that we couldn't have any anyways."

"Like not realizing that you want a sweet until your parents say you can't have any?" Jurl countered.

"You're killing me with these metaphors man." James replied. "And also yes."

They sat in silence for a minute. The noise of Amina and Kela moving about upstairs, and the small chainsaw snore of Tilo beneath James's jacket the only things interrupting it.

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Or at least that had been the plan. But the two mice that were pushed back through, didn't survive the trip. He'd also sent back the three vials of blood. His and Vickers' were currently being studied. But Amina's vial had practically burst upon arrival. James's vial had bubbled for a few minutes. Vickers' vial had simply been warm.

That was as concerning as anything else.

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By the time James was done with all the busy work it was almost night time. So he returned to his room.

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She knew he was stressed, and after seeing the difference between their blood samples, so was she.

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They stayed like that for a while in silence before James finally spoke.

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"Vickers might be able to go home. If they figure out the return trip fast enough. But I think I might be stuck here." He said.

"Is that such a bad thing?" She asked. She left the other question unsaid.

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"No." He replied. "But I'd kinda hoped to at least have it as an option."

"How did the rest of the tests go?" She asked.

"Poorly." He said, looking back up at the ceiling. "The two mice we sent back after only a few seconds of being here didn't make it either. So the blood, or magic, or whatever, isn't the only barrier."

"Well. That's good at least." She said.

"Yeah. Kinda?" He said. "But there's a slightly..... different issue."

"What is it?" She asked.

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"Amina." He began. "What's expected of us once we're married?" He asked.

She thought for a moment, confused at the turn that the conversation had taken.

"Well. You'll be a Prince by Dedication." She answered.

"That's what it's called here?" He asked, considering the title. "That sounds kinda nice actually. But what else?"

"Well." She said. "We'll have to visit a bit of my family, namely the ones that don't make the wedding. Then we'll go on a wedding vacation for a few months."

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"Yes." She said, suddenly knowing what he was getting at. "We'll be expected to have children."

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"Because of the blood?" She asked.

He looked back, and she saw genuine sadness on his face. Then he nodded again.

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She thought for a moment. "But you said that your blood was weird too." She countered.

He nodded again. "It is." He replied. "And it's entirely possible that, given enough time here, I might end up having blood just like yours." He looked at her again. "But it's also possible that it doesn't."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (126/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2w1n5/wait_is_this_just_gate_125/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Is any of this medically accurate? The spelling is. But other than that, probably not. But then again, James isn't going to understand any of this. And neither are the people on Earth. At least not yet.

Either way, it's already obvious to us (the readers) that James is undergoing a change.

Either way. Enjoy.

PS: I love when y'all spin off with all kinds of theories. Then I love watching them sail past as I ignore most of them and move on to different subjects.

\~

James, Amina, Kela, Veliry, Vickers, and Marcos sat in the conference room that had been set aside specifically for communicating with Earth. On the screen of the communication hub the General, the Colonel, and several members of the scientific staff were sitting at their table.

"So." The General said. "You're telling me that your time, and training, in that world has turned you into.... what.... some kinda superman?"

"I mean. I wouldn't go that far sir." James denied. "I mean, just this morning I stubbed my toe on a night stand. So I'm not exactly bulletproof

or anything like that. But I AM faster and stronger than I would normally be. And not by a small amount either."

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"Those anvils are about two hundred and fifty pounds." James says before anyone can ask.

"And you were practically curling them." Vickers says in amazement.

James just nods.

"Yep." He says. "And I'm not as strong as high end warriors like Amina, Kela, or the Clan leader Gixelle." He admits. "I mean, shit, y'all just saw Kraug carrying those things like they were nothing."

The General continued to stare at the small pop up screen on his side of the display for a few seconds.

"Okay." He says after a few moments. "I think I'm gonna need some kind of explanation."

The next few hours were a back and forth between the scientists on the Earth side, and Veliry and Marcos on the Kingdom's side.

Eventually the theory that the magical infusion inherent to the Petravian side of doorway might be why nothing survives the trip back is brought up.

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"You're sure this won't hurt. Right?" She asks.

James just smiles as he preps the needle and syringe.

"Relax." He says. "I've seen your scars remember? I know damn well that you've had worse. It's just a little pinch, then a few seconds later it's over."

He holds up a vial of dark red liquid for her to see, then points at the bandage on his elbow.

"See?" He asks. "Already got some of my own." Then he points at another vial. "And some of Vickers' blood too."

Amina looks at the vials with awe, disgust, and just a hint of fear.

James takes her hand in his. "Come on. You trust me, don't you?" He asks as he swabs the inside of her elbow with an alcohol wipe and also feels for the vein. He presses his thumb over it.

Amina looks at him. Then nods.

The needle enters the vein before she even realizes what's happening. Amina winces as a single red droplet comes out of the end of the catheter tube. James reaches over and grabs the vacuum tube and presses it in firmly for just a second, drawing another gasp, then undoes the elastic band.

"Big baby." he said.

A few more seconds and the vial was full. He presses his thumb to her vein again, pulls it out, writes "Amina" on the tape on its side, and places it into the rack. Then he quickly pulls out the catheter and slaps a bandage on the site.

"Press on that." He says, and Amina does. "See? That wasn't so bad."

"It really wasn't was it." Amina agrees. But she's staring at the vial of her blood.

"And that's three samples, from three different people, at three different levels of magical saturation." He says. "Not a huge sample, but whatever. Now let's take a look."

"Wait." Veliry interrupts, reminding James that she's there. "How did that vial take the blood out?"

"Remember vacuums?" He asks. "That vial has a bit of vacuum inside of it. Not enough to break it, but enough to pull some blood out."

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"Yaay for Phlebotomy 101." He said under his breath.

The blood looked exactly like the samples he'd studied in class. Nothing really stood out. But once the machine dinged with the warning that it was done analyzing, he saw that Vicker's Cholesterol was a little high, and that he had low hematocrit readings, and high levels of iron.

He thought the hematocrit readings might have been something. But he also remembered reading that high end athletes sometimes had low levels of it. Either way, it didn't seem to be related to magic.

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"Does that look.... brighter to you?" He asked.

Both Amina and Veliry nodded. The machine dinged and James looked at the test results.

Well, that was odd.

"My Oxygenation level is through the roof." He said. "According to this I'm Hyperoxic."

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James shook his head. "I... I don't know." he admitted. "According to this I should be suffering from extreme Oxygen Toxicity." He kept looking at the rest of the report. "There's an excess of platelets... I'm anemic?" He asked with confusion. "And my hematocrit levels are also low?"

"What does all of that mean?" Amina asked with concern.

James continued staring at the readout.

"I..... I honestly have no idea. According to this I'm like..... five different types of dead or dying." He replied.

James hit the save and clean functions.

"Let's just.... look at your sample." He said in frustration. When the machine signaled that it was ready he placed her vial into it.

He didn't have to wait for the analysis to know that her blood was different from his or Vickers'.

"What the fuck?" He said as he looked at the microscope feed.

"What?" Amina asked. She and Veliry both crowded over his shoulder to look at the small screen.

"Well." Veliry said. "That doesn't look like either of your other samples."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u4d1ol/wait_is_this_just_gate_127/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (126/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u2w0qp/wait_is_this_just_gate_125/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Is any of this medically accurate? The spelling is. But other than that, probably not. But then again, James isn't going to understand any of this. And neither are the people on Earth. At least not yet.

Either way, it's already obvious to us (the readers) that James is undergoing a change.

Either way. Enjoy.

PS: I love when y'all spin off with all kinds of theories. Then I love watching them sail past as I ignore most of them and move on to different subjects.

Also, just a reminder that r/GATEhouse *is up and running.*

\~

James, Amina, Kela, Veliry, Vickers, and Marcos sat in the conference room that had been set aside specifically for communicating with Earth. On the screen of the communication hub the General, the Colonel, and several members of the scientific staff were sitting at their table.

"So." The General said. "You're telling me that your time, and training, in that world has turned you into.... what.... some kinda superman?"

"I mean. I wouldn't go that far sir." James denied. "I mean, just this morning I stubbed my toe on a night stand. So I'm not exactly bulletproof or anything like that. But I AM faster and stronger than I would normally be. And not by a small amount either."

"And you found this out after a sparring session with Chief Vickers?" The General asked.

"Yes sir." He replied. "The princess was tasked with assessing the Chief's abilities." He looked at Amina for a second. "And probably with showing off what the people here are capable of." Vickers grunted a bit at that. "She beat him pretty soundly. Then the Chief challenged me. I was kind of roped into it."

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[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u4d063/wait_is_this_just_gate_127/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (125/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u26i5s/wait_is_this_just_gate_124/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u2f625/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James does, in fact, win the match. But the result, and its implication, is more important than the scene.

Also the subreddit for this story/universe is now up and running. Feel free to check out r/GATEhouse *if you want. And also feel free to add stuff to it.*

In the mean time, enjoy.

PS: We already know that James is a bit of an idiot. Don't blame him for it.

\~

I won? James thought, confused at the notion as he stood over Vickers. *Wait. I won?*

His training sword was pressed to Vickers' rib-cage, as if ready to stab the man in the lung. Vickers' hands were on the ground

"I won?" He asked of nobody in particular.

"I lost?" Vickers asked himself at almost the exact same moment.

\----------

James sat in the meeting room, still stunned at the unexpected victory over the Navy SEAL. Amina sat beside him, holding her hand just above James's left shoulder. It glowed with amber light, and the swelling in James's shoulder very slowly, receded. Despite the still lingering pain, he didn't even pay it any attention.

Vickers was in the corner of the room sulking. But still listened to Veliry's lesson with rapt attention.

It still didn't make any sense to James. Sure he'd been training for..... god, was it really almost a year now? But he was still a rookie compared to any of the people he'd been training with. Amina, Artair, Kela, Gixelle. They were all WAY better fighters than him.

And yet he'd won against Vickers. Against a SEAL.

It had finished three to five. So it wasn't the one sided affair that Amina had shown off. Hell, his bruises and the, now healed, cut on his cheek said as much.

But how?

That was what Veliry was explaining.

"So James." She said. "You know how one of the first things I taught you was how to draw energy in from around you?" She asked.

"Yeah."

"Well. Real quick. What sources can you pull magical energy from?" She asked. "Just a quick refresher for the sake of EVERYONE hearing it." She made a point to look at Vickers when she said the word EVERYONE.

James shook his head a little. "From damn near everything." He replied. "Hell, you can draw energy from the air if you want. It's just not a lot."

"Precisely." She agreed. "But you and Mr. Vickers here are from a world without magic. That's part of the reason that getting it to work took you so long and um..." She looked at Amina for a second. "Took such a traumatic event to make it click for you. You had no- or rather very little, at that point, magical reserves within yourself upon which to draw from."

"Okay?" James said, still confused. "But what does that have to do with me beating a SEAL in a fight?"

"I'm getting there." Veliry replied. "Now James. You revealed, much to Kela's and everyone who's heard it since suprise, that you can run. What did you say, twenty five miles?"

"Twenty six and change." He said.

Vickers turned to him. He actually looked impressed. "That's right. Your file said you used to run marathons. Any I'd know?" He asked.

"Did the Boston about seven years ago." James admitted.

"No shit." Vickers said. He looked up for a moment. "Eh, I wasn't there at the time. Otherwise we mighta bumped into eachother. How'd you do?"

"Finished." James admitted. "Wasn't trying to beat the Africans or anything like that. Just did it for the experience."

Vickers nodded. "Fair enough."

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That was a lot for James to digest.

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"Should've done that before you became a prisoner." Kela replied smugly. "We aren't teaching you any."

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I'm better at running than I am at lifting. He thought with a touch of excitement. *I wonder how fast this will make me?*

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"Wait.... So.... We know what happens when someone with NO magic in them comes to this world." The large man said. "They become stronger, faster, I'm gonna guess more durable too? Especially if they train their magic." Veliry nodded in response to the question. Vickers continued. "So what happens when someone whose body, whose whole lifestyle, depends on that magical.... What?... infusion? Goes to a world without magic?"

Everyone in the room froze as they considered the implication.

"I...." Veliry began. "I don't know." She admitted. "Probably nothing pleasant though."

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"Shit." James said under his breath. *I might never be going home. Even if they do figure it out.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/GATEhouse/comments/u3nt7l/wait_is_this_just_gate_126/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (125/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u26i5s/wait_is_this_just_gate_124/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James does, in fact, win the match. But the result, and its implication, is more important than the scene.

Also the subreddit for this story/universe is now up and running. Feel free to check out r/GATEhouse *if you want. And also feel free to add stuff to it.*

In the mean time, enjoy.

PS: We already know that James is a bit of an idiot. Don't blame him for it.

\~

I won? James thought, confused at the notion as he stood over Vickers. *Wait. I won?*

His training sword was pressed to Vickers' rib-cage, as if ready to stab the man in the lung. Vickers' hands were on the ground. He'd fallen after one of James's attacks had left him off balance.

"I won?" He asked of nobody in particular.

"I lost?" Vickers asked himself at almost the exact same moment.

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James sat in the meeting room, still stunned at the unexpected victory over the Navy SEAL. Amina sat beside him, holding her hand just above James's left shoulder. It glowed with amber light, and the swelling in James's shoulder very slowly, receded. Despite the still lingering pain, he didn't even pay it any attention.

Vickers was in the corner of the room sulking. But still listened to Veliry's lesson with rapt attention.

It still didn't make any sense to James. Sure he'd been training for..... god, was it really almost a year now? But he was still a rookie compared to any of the people he'd been training with. Amina, Artair, Kela, Gixelle. They were all WAY better fighters than him.

And yet he'd won against Vickers. Against a SEAL.

It had finished three to five. So it wasn't the one sided affair that Amina had shown off. Hell, his bruises and the, now healed, cut on his cheek said as much.

But how?

That was what Veliry was explaining.

"So James." She said. "You know how one of the first things I taught you was how to draw energy in from around you?" She asked.

"Yeah."

"Well. Real quick. What sources can you pull magical energy from?" She asked. "Just a quick refresher for the sake of EVERYONE hearing it." She made a point to look at Vickers when she said the word EVERYONE.

James shook his head a little. "From damn near everything." He replied. "Hell, you can draw energy from the air if you want. It's just not a lot."

"Precisely." She agreed. "But you and Mr. Vickers here are from a world without magic. That's part of the reason that getting it to work took you so long and um..." She looked at Amina for a second. "Took such a traumatic event to make it click for you. You had no- or rather very little, at that point, magical reserves within yourself upon which to draw from."

"Okay?" James said, still confused. "But what does that have to do with me beating a SEAL in a fight?"

"I'm getting there." Veliry replied. "Now James. You revealed, much to the surprise of Kela and everyone who's heard it since, that you can run. What did you say, twenty five miles?"

"Twenty six and change." He said.

Vickers turned to him. He actually looked impressed. "That's right. Your file said you used to run marathons. Any I'd know?" He asked.

"Did the Boston about seven years ago." James admitted.

"No shit." Vickers said. He looked up for a moment. "Eh, I wasn't there at the time. Otherwise we mighta bumped into eachother. How'd you do?"

"Finished." James admitted. "Wasn't trying to beat the Africans or anything like that. Just did it for the experience."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (124/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u1g4hv/wait_is_this_just_gate_123/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: I promise that the subreddit will be up this weekend, if not sooner. In the mean time, here's a fight.

Enjoy.

EDIT: The subreddit r/GATEhouse is now live. It's a work in progress. Be gentle. More content will be added as we go.

\~

"Do I really have to do this?" Vickers asked, disdain evident on his face.

"Got somewhere better to be?" James countered. "Or would you rather go back to shadowing me everywhere I go." Vickers' eyes widened at the fact that he'd been spotted. "Yeah." James said, reading his face. "I know you've been following me."

He didn't admit that he'd only caught on because Kela had smelled the man and told James that he was being followed. Although, he also hadn't been surprised at the fact.

Vickers face went from shocked to neutral in the blink of an eye.

James pointed at the table. It was just like the one he'd been presented with when he'd entered the trial duel with Prince Artair. The only real difference was that all of these weapons were blunted and had rounded tips. And there were no firearms.

Amina stood in the ring in her training armor, with a blunted sword and wooden shield, waiting.

Vickers sighed and approached the table. He started rooting through the weapons as James ran down the rules.

"Rule one. No killing. That one's pretty obvious."

Vickers grabbed a pair of daggers and tucked them into his belt.

"Rule two. No magic. Not really an issue since even I can tell you don't have the juice."

Vickers picked up a hand axe and waved it a few times, then set it back down.

"Rule three." James tried to think. He shrugged. "Well there really isn't a rule three. Just try to win. First one to five strikes takes it, and uh..... Good luck." He said.

Vickers just stared at him for a moment. James got the sense that the man was expecting more. But James didn't have anything else. So he just went back to picking weapons.

Eventually he settled on a short, curved sword that James thought of as a massive gladius style kukri, and a shield.

He paused before stepping in.

"Don't I get any armor?" He asked.

James tossed him a helmet that looked almost like a bucket with pads in it.

"She won't mess anything else up too bad." James said with a grin. "Trust me."

Vickers rolled his eyes before putting it on. Then he entered the ring.

"Ready?" Amina asked.

Vickers just grunted.

James, Kela, and a handful of the guards who had been training in the yard gathered to watch as the two warriors raised their weapons.

"Five gold on Amina." James said to Kela.

"What? That's not fair." Kela protested. "I was going to bet on Amina."

"Too bad. I beat ya to it." James replied.

Kela growled a bit before nodding. "Fine."

\----------

Vickers knew better than to think that the woman across from him was just a pretty girl with a sword.

She may have been a Princess. But she was also a General. Plus, according to some of Choi's earlier reports she had been the pack leader of the wolf that had beat him in the bar. Some sort of might is right leadership role that meant that at some point the young woman had beat that wolf in a fight.

Plus her stance as she stood across from him was excellent.

He'd trained with swords and axes and spears and whatnot back on earth. Originally it had just been something to do out of curiosity more than anything. But when the mission details had been given to him, he'd been given crash courses on them from actual medieval weapon and fighting experts.

He wasn't a master of any of them, not by a long shot. But he was better than the average person for sure. And his training and tactical acumen as a SEAL meant that he was even better still.

But he had no illusions about what was about to happen.

"START!" Choi shouted from the side of the ring.

He began to charge forward. Trying to get the element of surprise on his side.

The Princess moved so fast that Vickers' eyes went wide in surprise.

He had seen inhuman speed once before, when he'd faced the werewolf. The eery sense that something so large, so strong, and so well armored SHOULDN'T be able to move that fast. It was a haunting thing.

But with the werewolf it had made a sort of sense. It was, after all, a werewolf. A creature literally from human folktales and mythology. For it to have speed that made no sense normally, wasn't outside the realm of what a mind could reconcile.

But the Princess was human.

And she was, somehow, faster still.

Vickers had barely begun to pull his sword back for a strike when the long slender blade that the Princess had, snaked its way past his shield and lightly tapped his throat.

He jumped back out of surprise, touching his throat with the fingers of his sword hand to make sure that it wasn't bleeding.

She was simply standing there, sword in the same position it had been in for the strike.

"One to me." She said with a small smile.

Vickers didn't let the anger show on his face. He simply raised the shield again, and let her come to him.

When she did, Vickers wasn't surprised by the speed. Instead, he tried to use it against her. He saw the flash of the blade as it moved, and dove forward, using his shield hand to spring into a roll that went under the blade by just a bit.

When his feet touched the ground he immediately pivoted back to get his eyes back on her.

The tip of her sword was only inches from his face, and gently tapped the forehead of his helmet just as he realized what had happened.

She read that too?

"Two to me." She said.

Vickers stood up straight and glared at her.

Alright. No more sparring. He thought to himself. *Now..... Kill.*

It was the thought process he used whenever he needed to get something done that he wouldn't normally be capable of. It was the switch he flipped whenever he needed to rely less on his mind, and more on his physiology.

It was the thing he told himself when he wanted to switch from simply practicing, to letting the adrenaline pump so he could prove something.

He rocked his shoulders forward and cracked his neck to each side. A bit cliche, he knew, but it helped him get loose.

He felt his mouth go dry, and felt his heart begin to pump faster. He'd learned a long time ago how to trigger his body's survival reflexes. And he did it now.

When the princess stepped forward, he actually saw it. She was still moving fast. Faster than anyone he'd ever had to fight before, even now as his brain began to hyper-focus on her.

But he could see the movements.

He watched her feet.

He saw them moving, faster than most people could sprint, toward him.

He raised his shield in anticipation.

Then he saw the front leg angle to his right. To his un-shielded side.

He was about to turn that way when he saw the foot turn, then plant, and the other leg began kicking off in the opposite direction.

He lowered himself as he moved in, and began bringing the short sword up for a thrust.

Suddenly the princess transitioned from a leap, to a flying spin, almost like some kind of ice skater performing a trick. Then he felt a ringing impact as his sword was knocked up and away from its intended strike by her sword as it spun with her.

His momentum carried him forward another step and then he felt a slap on his back.

When he turned she was planted on the ground with her sword pointed at his back.

"Three to me." She said. "But that was a lot better." She added.

He glanced to the side and saw the crowd simply watching. As if they'd seen this a million times.

He felt the scowl on his face.

He tossed the shield and sword to the sides. Then he drew the daggers.

The princess grinned and tossed her shield aside too. But she kept the sword.

Vickers rushed in, on the offensive.

The daggers were longer than the combat knives he was used to, but not by a lot. They were shaped like swords, complete with hand guards and pommels. He'd thought that would be awkward, but he actually liked the balance that the pommels gave the blades.

He wasn't great with sword and shield. Good, better than most, sure. But not great.

But he was great with knives. He and the other SEALS trained with them extensively.

This was his comfort zone.

He brought his left foot in as he jabbed with the left arm. She dodged it easily. But when she did he pivoted and brought the right dagger in in a wide sweep, going for the slice. She ducked under it unnaturally fast as she continued moving to the side. His left hand flashed back in, trying to get her in the chest as she ducked. The right hand and its dagger followed in a backhanded slash to try to catch her as she rose up. She leapt back quickly and landed as gracefully as a ballerina.

She hadn't even used her sword to intervene. She'd simply held it off to the side, out of the way

Vickers squared up again and began advancing once more.

When he got close he began punching in like a boxer. If his hands had been angled with the knuckles forward he would have even looked like a boxer. But they were punching in with the knives leading.

Still, the strikes were fast. He jabbed, crossed, and hooked just like he had in his high school years. He just did it with blades as the focus instead.

He let the adrenaline enhance his speed as much as it could.

The dirt they kicked up as they moved, seemed to fly in slow motion.

He was acutely aware of the bead of sweat rolling down the left side of his face as he exerted himself desperately to hit this infuriatingly fast woman.

He heard the cheers of the guards from the sidelines just past the eternal ringing that his ears had had for years.

But what he was most aware of, was the small smirk on the Princess's face as she dodged his attacks as easily as he might dodge a child's.

He wasn't accustomed to being evenly matched with anyone except his fellow SEALS, and even then he could usually win.

But right now he was being toyed with.

She seemed to sense his frustration, and began to bring her sword up.

He figured, it was time to fight dirty. Literally.

He brought one of the knives up in the first "uppercut" of the current attempt at a point. When he did, he also kicked into the ground as hard as he could, digging the toe of his boot in deep before bringing it up.

He kicked dirt in her face.

He saw, with his current hyper-focus, the shock on her face as she realized what was happening.

He punched one of the knives through the spray of dirt, aiming it at her chest plate.

And he hit air.

Before he had time to realize what had happened, the tip of her sword rose up from beneath him, through the same spray of dirt, and rested itself just under his rib-cage.

As the dirt settled he saw what she'd done.

She'd seen the dirt and realized the play. Then she'd used it as cover as she dropped to the ground, practically sitting down, and stabbed upwards.

"Four to me." She said, before spitting out some of the dirt. "Dirty move. I approve." She added.

He didn't wait for a reset.

He was on her.

She wasn't surprised. She'd seen his slowly rising anger as the fight had continued.

She rolled off to the side as he brought one of the daggers down at her, rising up as she did. Before she'd even gotten to her feet all the way Vickers was after her. Daggers punching in even faster than last time.

She back pedaled slowly as he advanced. Dodging each strike just like last time. But they were faster than before, and she began to feel them getting closer to actually striking.

She was, if anything, impressed.

So she actually began to use the sword to block the daggers.

In such close quarters, against dual daggers moving as fast as his were, it actually required effort. Swords weren't fast, not like daggers were, and the length of the blade meant that it took time to get it in position to block the rapid assault.

Between the effort of both dodging and blocking, Amina was practically blurring. So were Vicker's arms as he trudged forward. He was actually doing a good job of not giving her a window to attack back.

But he wasn't the only one that could fight dirty.

The fight didn't end with a sword strike, or a dagger strike.

It ended when Amina saw an opening in Vickers' attacks.

It ended when she punched him in the stomach with her off hand hard enough to make him double over and fall to his knees gasping for breath. The strike was so fast he didn't see it.

The only consolation he got from the strike was that she was wearing gauntlets, so he knew that her strikes were harder than they'd normally be.

It didn't change the fact that he'd never been punched that hard by anyone before. Not even during his boxing days against opponents as large as he'd been.

Amina tapped the tip of her blade to his back.

"Five to me." She said as she began walking away. "Match."

Vickers did what he could to breath.

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James held out his hand. Kela scowled as she dug into one of her pouches and then slapped five gold coins into it.

"It was the obvious conclusion." She said.

"Of course it was." He said with a grin. "But I beat you to it. Besides. It's not like I'm allowed to bet against my fiance. She'd kill me if she found out."

Everyone stopped talking as they heard a noise from the ring.

Vickers was saying something from where he lay on the ground.

"What!?" One of the guards yelled.

"Choi." Vickers said weakly. "Let me face Choi."

Everyone looked at James.

James looked around awkwardly. There was no way he was fighting a Navy SEAL. Not even with all of his new training. He was about to say as much when Kela spoke.

"I got five gold on him." She said with a grin, as she jerked a thumb over her shoulder at Vickers.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (123/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tzd72v/wait_is_this_just_gate_122/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: This is a bit of a short one. Did some automotive work this weekend so I'm tired AF. Which is also my excuse for not getting the subreddit started. It'll go live soon enough.

In the mean time, enjoy a bit of wholesomeness.

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Margaret Choi smiled at the guard as they checked her bag. The guard either didn't notice, or didn't care. Same as every day.

And she did check in at the pentagon every day. For months now.

More often than not she got told that there was nothing new. But every now and then she'd get some new tidbit of info. James had returned from a trip. James had survived an ambush. James had helped the locals find some new thing that they would need. The details were kept sparse, but they let her know that he was alive.

But she was lucky if she got an update like that maybe once a week, and that was if she was being generous.

So it was great news when she was told that James had recorded a video message for her.

That was another thing in itself, a VIDEO message. Not just an audio recording or a text message. But actual footage. Visual proof of her son being alive.

Plus it meant that they were letting her know more.

She sat in the conference room with the attendant who was always present to ensure that she didn't record anything, not that she was allowed to have her phone or anything.

The video started playing. She couldn't help but smile when she saw him.

He looked bigger. He'd already gotten toned and muscular from his time in the army. But now he was looking almost bulky. His hair had grown out, no longer the high and tight fade that he'd kept for the army. Instead it was long, and swept to the side, a few locks hanging down over his forehead, though he still kept the sides short. He also had stubble and a mustache/goatee that reminded her of his father before he'd been drafted.

He wasn't wearing a uniform. In fact, if she hadn't known better she would have thought he was wearing some kind of pirate's costume. But there were things that didn't match up. The shirt looked like a standard blue dress shirt that you could buy at any store. The pants were brown and looked hand stitched, plus he had what she assumed was his military uniform belt on, with its holstered pistol and ammo, on one side. Then he had his brown army boots on instead of large leather ones that folded over. The most interesting thing though, was the handle of what she could only assume was a sword, peeking over his shoulder.

She noticed all of this as he finished placing the camera down and stepped back so that she could see all of him. He smiled wide and asymmetrically, showing teeth on the left side of his mouth only. Just like his father always had, and just like his brother did whenever he was really excited about something. She couldn't help but smile too.

Mijo. She thought. *It really is you, isn't it? Where the hell are you?*

But her thoughts were interrupted by James speaking.

>"Hey mom!" He said, still grinning. "Sorry I haven't messaged in a while. Been on the road."
>
>He pointed behind him and she noticed the stone masonry behind him for what seemed like the first time. There was a window too, and outside it showed a grey sky.
>
>"It's winter here. So travel got kind of difficult. Took longer than expected. I convinced the General to let me send a video. He's uh.... well he's gonna let you know a bit more about what's going on. Not gonna lie to you. They've been diggin into you and dad's history, you know dad being Korean and all. They had to make sure." He looked down and she could see a sign of sadness for just a flash. Then he was smiling again. "But um... yeah. They should be letting you a little deeper into the craziness."
>
>He gestured at himself, showing off the clothes he was wearing.
>
>"As you can guess I'm not exactly in a NORMAL place." He looked down again. "You're probably not going to believe them at first. But it's real. You'll know what I'm talking about soon enough."
>
>Then he smiled wider.
>

>"But now I need to get to the important part. And you're probably gonna forget about all the rest for a bit."
>
>He reached his hand out off to the side of the screen. Suddenly another hand took his and James pulled a woman into the screen and placed his hand on her opposite hip.
>
>"Mom." He said. "This is Amina. She's uh.... well she's my fiance."

"Damn." Said the young captain that was her attendant for this visit. The young woman turned red when Margaret looked at her in surprise. "Sorry ma'am." She said.

She looked back at the screen. The woman, Amina James had called her, was stunning. She had to be at least four or five inches taller than her son. Long, black, wavy hair swept over her left shoulder and down her front. Light brown eyes looked back at the camera. She was smiling almost as wide as James was.

She was wearing something that looked almost like an old revolution era uniform but with bits of gleaming metal armor placed over it in several places. She had a sword on her hip that her gloved left hand seemed to rest on by default.

She looked like a super model in battle armor.

And she was James's.... fiance?

>"Hello, Mrs. DeLaRosa." The woman said in slow English. The accent was like something out of eastern Europe. "I am so happy to meet you. Even if it isn't in person."
>
>She looked back at James as if unsure of whether she should continue. James just smiled and nodded. His hand snaked back from behind her and took her hand. Then she looked back.
>
>"Your son has told me so much about you, and his brother and father. I wish I could meet you in person. You all sound like incredible people. James and I are excited to join our families."
>
>Amina looked at James again. Once again he just nodded.
>
>"James tells me that you'll either be, as he says 'Over the moon' with happiness. Or incredibly angry that you didn't get to... 'vet'.... me?" She said the last bit with the hint of a question.

Margaret had to admit that she was torn between the two options. On the one hand, her son was getting married to some kind of Amazonian.

On the other hand, who the hell was this woman? And how had she snagged up her Jamesy? She thought that last part despite realizing that the woman's beauty had likely been a factor.

>"I just want you to know." Amina continued. "That James and I have come to care for, and love, each other very deeply."
>
>James nodded as he looked at the camera.
>
>"And I'll do everything I can to be the woman who will not only meet, but exceed, your hopes."
>
>She stopped talking and looked at James. James looked at her and Margaret saw the truth in everything that had been said.
>
>"It's all true mom. Every word." He said simply. "I've been wanting to send you a message like this for a minute. But, well, couldn't. OPSEC and all that."
>
>He cleared his throat before speaking again.
>
>"I love you guys." He said. "Tell Joey I said hi. I'll update you as soon as I can. Like I said; the General should be opening up more doors for you soon enough. You might have to bug him a bit though. I know you're good at it."
>
>He looked at Amina and then turned back, smiling even wider than before.
>
>"James and Amina, signing off."

The footage froze. The video message was over.

Margaret jumped a little when a hand holding a box of tissues reached in front of her. The Captain was holding it with a small smile.

"Lucky guy." The Captain said.

Margaret took a napkin. Then realized that she had cried, if only a little. She wiped at the tears absently.

Her boy was alive. Truly alive. And somehow, the announcement of his engagement, to someone that he seemed to genuinely care about, was what had filled her cup just a bit too much.

She smiled.

"Yeah." She said. "And I'm a lucky mom."

\----------

James fiddled with the phone a little bit. "Alright." He said. "I think that went well."

He held the phone cautiously. As if he was afraid that his mom was going to call him right now, even though he hadn't sent the message back. Even when he did, it'd go through command first, get scrubbed for anything too crazy, and THEN shown to his mom.

"Do you think?" Amina began. "Do you think she'll like me?" She asked hesitantly.

James looked at her, surprised.

"Of course she will." He said simply. "You're with me. She's gonna love you." He looked at the phone with concern. "I on the other hand.... Am probably in mortal peril. I can practically feel my ear being pulled from the other dimension."

She wrapped her arms around him and planted a kiss on the ear closest to her.

"Come on." She said. "I'm supposed to face that Vickers man in the training ring, see what he can do."

"Ooh. That'll be fun." James said. "Be nice to see him get his ass kicked in person."

The two of them walked out, arm in arm.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/u26i5s/wait_is_this_just_gate_124/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (122/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tyk4ob/wait_is_this_just_gate_121/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Woooo! Progress and answers.... kinda.

Enjoy.

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James walked down the long hallway speaking as he went.

"This is the dining hall." He said, pointing to the left. "Think of it like a mess hall back home. Open twenty four seven. Though the best food is early morning, midday, and about sunset."

Vickers walked behind him sullenly, limping lightly. Kela walked behind him, her new axe glistening on her back. Vickers had a pair of metal cuffs magically fastened to his ankles, restriction runes glowing softly from their sides.

"The food's safe to eat?" Vickers asked

"Did you die to any of the food on your way here?" James countered.

Vickers just grunted.

James ignored him. A few minutes he pointed at another room, one of his favorites.

"This is the bathes." He said. "The bathtubs are magically enchanted to do EXACTLY what your body needs to do to relax. Not anything naughty, mind you. But if you need to get loose." He closed his eyes and nodded his head. "That's the place to go."

Vickers actually looked like he was interested in that. It had been a minute since he'd had a real bath.

A few more minutes of walking then they arrived at the wing with the living quarters.

"This is where most people live. Kela's quarters are down here. So are mine and the princess's. If you need anything you can come knock. Although I imagine that the guards escorting you everywhere will be able to help you if you really need it." He said. "Those are the big ones. There's a training yard outside if you need to keep the muscles big and the reflexes fast. Other than that you've got, more or less, free run of the castle. Shackles will stop you if you try to go anywhere you're not supposed to, or try to escape."

Vickers looked at the bands on his ankles.

"If you say so." He said. "Can I go now?"

James looked at Kela, who simply shrugged.

"They already showed you your room, right?" James asked.

"Yup."

"Then.... yeah man." James said as he gestured down the hall. Instead Vickers turned around and walked the other way. He looked as though he was going to try to shoulder check Kela, but instead side stepped around her, then headed down the hall towards the baths.

"REMEMBER!" James shouted to him as he rounded the corner. "COME FIND ONE OF US IF YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE BACK HOME!" Jame waited to see if the man would answer. But he didn't. "Or not. Whatever." He said to himself.

"What an asshole." Kela said as she turned back to James.

James just shrugged. "Time for my interview?" He asked.

"If you're up for it." She said. "Sure you're you?" She asked.

"If I'm not, then I'm a damn good copycat. I've been craving a cheeseburger for days now." He replied.

"Oh. You can get those in the dining hall now." She said as they began walking back to the interrogation room.

"Seriously?" He asked.

"Yes. I showed them the recipe." She said.

"That's awesome. Let's eat before Veliry picks my brain and figures out if I'm a THING." He said with a laugh.

\--------------------------------

After the interrogation, and a bill of clean mental health, James went back to his and Amina's room.

Amina was off somewhere being a General so he had some alone time.

He hoped she wasn't avoiding him. She'd seemed a little unsettled after their last conversation, and he couldn't blame her for it.

He was tired.

Being an ambassador was tiring. Being one that had to cover his nation's ass after a fuck up was worse. Especially since he'd had to admit to the King about his lies afterwords.

That conversation had been nearly an hour long. But at the very least, the King had understood his reasoning, and had warmed back up as a result. But he had also admitted that he would be keeping an eye on both him and Vickers from now on. Especially Vickers.

Dealing with Vickers was its own ordeal. The man oozed a negative, hostile, practically visible aura of "Go Fuck Yourself" to everyone around him. And James had a sense that Vickers would attack him if he could.

Kela had confirmed that that very attitude had been why she had attacked the operative in the bar. Her natural instincts telling her that she was in danger just from being near the man. The little scar at the base of her ear was a sign of just how accurate that had been.

And from a fucking coin. James thought. *That's some fucking batman, John Wick, shit.*

He had a feeling that sooner or later he would have to deal with Vickers. He had a feeling that his training since coming here would level that playing field. But the fact that Vickers was a SEAL made him question it. The man seemed to constantly be surveying his surroundings, and James knew that it was his tactical mind analyzing anything that could give him an opportunity.

He was only playing nice because he didn't have enough info, and had orders to do so.

But James's mind kept going back to what Vickers had said in the interview.

>"Not until I'm ordered to be one."

The memory of how calmly the man had said that made James shudder. He'd been in chains, in a locked room, unarmed, and staring down a werewolf who'd already beat him in a fight once. And yet he'd said the words as though simply telling someone a fact. As if saying, "There's air outside." or "Water makes things wet."

Not a boast. Not a threat, even if it was. Simply a statement of what would happen in a given scenario.

James hoped that Vickers never got any orders to make it happen.

His head hurt thinking about what he'd do if that happened. So he decided to think of something else.

They sent him here. James thought. *But not HERE here. Somewhere else. Somewhere far to the south and west. Was that intentional? It had to be, right? Sure it's new tech. But there's no way they send a live person, a SEAL no less, if they haven't done a few tests before. Hell, they sent a drone through before they'd send a bottle of tequila as a gift.*

James didn't like the implication.

And he had the sinking suspicion that Vickers was simply the tip of the proverbial spear.

"They're going to send more." He said to himself. *If they haven't already.* He left unsaid.

He had to think of something else. So he went over to the table where Amina had put the letter from Gixelle after he'd recovered from the Agency's attack.

The memory of the experience, and the fact that they could remotely jam their hands into his brain (successful or not), sent a chill down his spine as he picked up the letter.

Nope. Not thinking of that. Not right now. He thought. *Drake puppies. Cute little murderous drake puppies.*

He opened the letter and began reading. There was an drawing with it that Gixelle had used a piece of enchanted parchment to create. Then she'd colored it with some kind of paint.

"Huh." He said as he read the letter and looked at the illustration.

The drakes had come out as a mix of different appearances like Gixelle had said. Seventeen had survived the hatch. Fourteen of those had survived the first week, a benchmark according to Gixelle. They ran the gamut from being carbon copies of Steve or Maxel, to mixes of the two.

But the majority of them were a dark, almost olive, green color. With furred crests around their head, and viper-like faces. The fur looked soft and almost fluffy, almost like fur/feathers that he'd seen on baby penguins. She admitted that there'd be no way to know how big they would get until they were adults.

But she couldn't stay near them that long. The babies had eaten the unhatched egg strand and all the stockpiled carcasses already and she was officially on the menu. So she'd retreated back to the town to let Maxel teach the kids the basics. Maxel would do as Steve had and come find her whenever it was time to leave the babies to their own devices.

She thanked James for all the help, not just with the drakes but also with the delivery pains that Gixelle had gone through as a result. She admitted to knowing that he'd taken some of the pain without the help of the potions so that she could have them, and she thanked him for the kindness.

Then she told him that he needed to give Amina a taste of that kindof fatherly instinct as soon as he could. Then she threatened him in case he decided not to let her be there for the wedding or the inevitable babies afterwards.

James's face was beat red when Amina walked through the door right as he was finishing the letter.

"Is everything okay?" She asked.

"It's fine. I'm fine." He said quickly. He held up the colored drawings as a distraction. "Gixelle sent us pictures of the drake hatchlings." He said.

Amina walked forward and grabbed the piece of parchment eagerly. As she did she asked. "I take it Veliry said that your mind is okay?"

"Yeah." He gestured at the images. "Cute right?" He asked.

Her eyebrows raised a bit as she looked at them. "Not the term I'd use for what are eventually going to be apex predators. But sure." She pointed at one that was a light shade of purple with green spots down its side. "That one is pretty though." She held her hand out to James's other hand. "What else did she send? She must have sent a letter with this."

James held the letter back instinctively. "Oh. Ummm. Just, a thank you.... for helping out." He said.

Amina stared at him, clearly not believing it. James threw on a cheesy smile.

"Wanna go grab some burgers?" He asked. "Kela told the kitchen cooks how to make them."

Amina still wasn't buying it.

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Many miles southwest of the capital. Seven people looked at the forest that they'd been using as a base camp for what was probably the last time.

They'd followed their orders and gathered to destroy or bury the equipment that wasn't absolutely vital to their mission. Several of them, namely "Elvis" Arroyo, went into town and bought a wagon some horses and supplies.

Now they were ready to move out.

Their objective was NOT the capital. That was far too dangerous now that the local government had reason to suspect other entry sites.

Instead they were heading to a mountain range far to the east of where they were. They were to gather as much information on it as they could, posing as aspiring miners looking to strike it rich.

But really, they were just trying to get their eyes on the desert nestled in the middle of it. If it was clear, they'd give the people back home a message through the drone network that they'd be laying on the way there. If it wasn't then they were tasked with finding an alternative site, or coming up with a tactical plan to clear it out.

"Come on." Master Sergeant Nguyen said as he pulled up the hood on his robes. "Let's get going before someone sees us and wonders why a bunch of people are staring into the woods."

They all lingered just a moment longer, even the MSG. Then they turned and either climbed onto their horses, or into the wagon.

Arroyo rode back the other direction, towards a part of the country known as Estland. He'd been chosen to play the part of "The other survivor" to help sell Chief Vickers' story to the locals. He was a loud, and at times obnoxious person. But it was intentional. Part of the persona. He'd keep his head down until he got there. Then he'd play the part of the desperate, stranded, foreigner looking for help.

\`It didn't sit well with any of them that they were effectively going to be the first players in the inter-dimensional spy games.

But it wasn't like they could go back home. Not yet anyways.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (121/?)

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Writer's note: (Jeremy Clarkson voice) INTONIGHT'SEPISODE The Colonel wears a metaphorical cone of shame. Vickers threatens a werewolf. And James talks to the headmaster of the school.

PS: Remember that Vickers is from Boston. And a SEAL. Interviewing him is.... challenging

Side note: I'm gonna take some time this weekend to make a WitjGATE subreddit and uploading all the chapters to it. Gonna be a minute before that's complete. But i'll put the link up whenever it's ready. Also feel free to come up with a better name for it.

In the mean time, Enjoy.

\~

"So...." General Krick said as he hit the cut off button on the terminal in the conference room. "That was a grade-A fuck up." He pulled his smoke tin out and opened it entirely, inside at the far end was a short, fat, cigar and a single match which he pulled out. He placed the cigar in the corner of his mouth and flicked the match to life. A few puffs and the cigar was lit enough to smoke. "You should thank Captain Choi for having the brains to come up with a half decent cover up on the fly. Even if I doubt that the King bought any of that bullshit." He said as he puffed out the first few mouthfuls of rich, peppery, smoke.

Colonel Muhammed stood still where she was. This wasn't the time for her to speak and she knew it.

"Still." The General continued. "Vickers has.... technically... accomplished his goal." A few more puffs. "He's in the capital. He's got eyes on Choi and the royals, albeit not from the position we'd hoped." He puffed a few more times. "But we have to assume that the secondary site is about to be burned." He rubbed his temple absently for a second. "Tell the crew there to scuttle anything non-essential, then hit the road in whichever direction looks safest, deep cover. Also, tell Elvis and the other chuckle-fuck to get better aliases."

The Colonel nodded.

"We'll have to push the third site back a bit. Reevaluate things." He said.

She had a feeling that she knew what was coming next.

"You're going to be going over whenever I give that one the green light. Boots on the ground." He pointed at her. "And if you fuck up this time. I'm gonna make sure Choi feeds you to that lizard of his."

She nodded again.

"Words, Colonel." He said simply.

"I understand sir." She said.

"Good." He said, sinking back into his chair. "Now go clean up your mess." He took a long drag on the cigar and held it. When he let it out he did so with a sigh. "I have to call the powers that be now."

\----------

"Full name." Kela asked. She was sitting in the same spot she'd sat in when she'd first questioned James after he'd gotten here.

Only now, James was on the other side of the mirror, along with Veliry and two guards.

Vickers sat where James had sat before.

"Sebastian Anthony Vickers." The large Navy SEAL said from where he sat. He was staring Kela in the eyes, almost unblinkingly. His arms were crossed. His left leg, still bandaged, stuck out at an angle as he leaned back. His right leg was shackled to the ground.

"Where are you from Mr. Vickers?"

"Earth." He said simply.

"Profession?" She asked.

"Military."

The side of the mirror James was looking through flared a light yellow. James looked at Veliry.

"True, but incomplete." She whispered.

James nodded as if he understood. But the fact that this room could tell them that much worried him a bit. How much had they learned from him?

"What was your objective here?" Kela asked.

"Survive." Vickers responded, keeping to the single word answers. The window flared yellow again. One of the guards behind him clicked their tongue. Kela's ear perked up a bit, but only a little.

"Was that all?" She asked.

"Yup." A red flare this time. The guard let out a low whistle. Kela's ear twitched again.

Kela changed topics.

"Was anyone else with you when you came to this world?" She asked.

"Nope." The window didn't flare at all. James was actually surprised by that.

"Did you know that you were going to be brought to this world?

"Had a suspicion." He said. Again, no flare. But at least there was more than one word in the response.

"Elaborate on that."

"Like the General said; damn thing was unstable. No knowing what it was gonna do. Ask Choi. Military gear is built by the lowest bidder." He responded. Again, no flare.

Veliry looked at him curiously. James shrugged.

"That's true." He whispered. She looked at him with apprehension. "Hell, my vest was made in a factory staffed by blind people." Her jaw dropped. But James just went back to watching the interview.

"What was the netting of wires and cables that was in your jacket?" Kela askedd. "Captain Choi said that they looked like sensors, or maybe cameras."

James saw Vickers' Jaw clench for just a moment.

"They were." Vickers admitted. "I had to have those on at the Earth-side facility as part of my job. They got fried on this side though. Something fucky with the program, wiped it all."

To James's surprise, the window didn't flare at all.

"What is it made to record?"

"Video mainly. Kinda like a body cam. But it also checks temperatures, air density, my vitals, and a few other things. I think they just wanted all the data they could get from the people near the doorway. A lot of people were required to wear them." He answered. Still no flare.

"Do you intend to harm anyone here in the capital?" She asked out of nowhere.

"No." Still nothing.

"Do you intend to harm the kingdom in any way?"

"No."

"Do you intend to progress your world's objectives? Even if they conflict with the kingdoms?" She asked. She hadn't asked James that question.

"Yes." He said simply. Kela showed just a hint of shock.

"Really?" She asked.

"Of course." He replied. "I am, first and foremost, a member of the United States Military." He turned and stared at the mirror. "It's objectives are always my priority. Even the ones I don't really like. Everything else is secondary."

The window didn't flare.

Kela looked at them. But when neither guard made a noise, she continued.

"Are you a threat to the kingdom?" She asked.

"Not until I'm ordered to be one." He said with a small smile.

There was still no flare.

The two of them stared at each other for what seemed like minutes.

"I guess I'll have to be there for that." She said.

Vickers leaned back in his chair a bit more.

"I'm always ready for rematches." He said simply.

Kela stood and left the room. When the door opened she told the guards to take Vickers back to his room. After a minute James and Veliry left the observation room.

When they did, Kela simply turned to James.

"Who did they send over?" She asked him.

James didn't want to tell her. He still felt the compulsion to keep it to himself. But he had to.

"He's a SEAL." James said. "They are our countries greatest, most secretive, DEADLIEST, operatives." He looked down and away for a minute. "You want an enemy supply line cut off? Need an enemy warlord taken out without anyone knowing? Need the secret plans for an enemy super weapon?" He pointed the way he knew Vickers had been taken. "You call up guys like him."

"And he was just a 'Chief of Security'?" She asked.

James shrugged. "I'd hire a seal to lead security." He admitted. "Aint nobody breakin' in somewhere that's being watched by one of those guys."

She put her hand to her chin in thought.

"I gotta go." James said. "I have to talk to someone."

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James rounded the corner and the guards at the door crossed their halberds, barring his entrance to the King's study.

"Bit cliche." He said to himself as he walked up. "But fair."

"No visitors." The guard on the left said. "The King is not to be disturbed."

"Got it." James replied. He made sure to raise his voice a bit. "But I have a feeling that he's actually expecting me."

The guard was about to speak again when the King's voice interrupted from the other side of the door.

"Let him in!"

The two guards, professionals that they were, uncrossed their weapons almost instantly. No hesitation. Then the one on the right stepped over and opened the door for him.

James nodded as he stepped into the room. The guard closed the door behind him.

He was surprised at how simple the King's Study was. There was startlingly little to say that it was anything other than an office. The chair behind the desk was nicer than most of the ones he'd seen in the castle. And there were several large book shelves and a map of the kingdom on the wall between them. But other than that it could have been the office of any high end college dean.

The king was leaning against a table that had a globe built into its center.

"How can I help you Captain Choi?" The king asked, and James got the same sense of being held at arms length again.

"I..." He started. "I lied to you yesterday." He said at last. "And I helped the General and Chief Vickers lie to you too." He didn't look away. Didn't hide. He even tried to hold his head up high. But the lump in his throat as he spoke made it feel awkward.

"Yes." King Farrick replied. "I know. Care to tell me why?"

"That's actually why I came here." James replied.

The King stared at him for a moment. Then nodded and gestured at the chair on James's side of the large desk. His mouth hinted at a smile for just a moment.

"Good." The King said, a bit of the warmth trickling back into his voice. "Then let's discuss it."

James sat down, and had a very difficult discussion with his future father in law.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (120/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tx1quv/wait_is_this_just_gate_119/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James does a diplomacy.

Also, would you guys like for me to make a subreddit for this series? You know, like the one SSB has?

It'd be a pain to re-upload everything. But as some readers have noticed, the world is about to expand a bit. It might open up space for side stories. Plus people would be able to post fanart. Might be fun.

Let me know what you guys think.

Anyways, enjoy.

\~

James hadn't liked being the translator the first time the King had spoken with the people back on Earth.

He didn't like doing it now. But he did have to admit that he felt somewhat smug throughout the conversation. After all, he'd called it.

He had seen King Farrick mad once before. Namely when he and Amina had revealed their relationship to him.

But that had mostly been the King having to be upset as a father seeing his daughter run off with the crazy guy from out of town.

This was different.

This was a King being mad at another Government.

King Farrick wasn't loud.

He wasn't overly animated.

He didn't curse or make bold exclamations.

If anything he was ice cold. James had the sense that he had shut off all emotions. That was the impression that he gave as he spoke with General Krick.

It scared James a little bit.

Vickers, to his credit, remained completely neutral from where he sat at the end of the table.

King Farrick had had the communication hub brought into one of the many meeting rooms in the Ambassadorial Wing of the castle. James, Amina, and Kela sat on one side. The King, Veliry, and one of the King's aides sat on the other. The hub, or at least the screen and webcam from it sat on the far end, with Vickers next to it.

When the conversation had started James had spoken to the General and the Colonel, who stood behind the General looking like a beaten dog, and told them the story that Vickers had given him about the accident during a test to create a secondary doorway to see if it would allow return trips.

It had been a lie. One that James had had to make up pretty much on the spot. He hated it. Vickers had simply nodded along.

The General picked up on what James was putting down. He'd expanded on the fact that they had been trying to test possible work arounds for getting people back through the doorways. Then he'd gone on to lie, flawlessly James thought, about how the doorway they'd opened had been incredibly unstable. How it had only been meant to have a single sensor drone thrown through and then closed. But it had begun jumping around the facility. That was how Chief Vickers, who he explained was the facility's chief of security, as well as two other people had been taken by the doorway. The sensor hadn't reported anything to them, so they'd assumed it was a failed test. As such they had also assumed that Vickers and the other two were lost as well.

The General voiced that Vickers being alive was a good sign that maybe the the test had been at least partially successful, and also voiced the fact that if Vickers had been, then maybe the other two were alive as well. Or at least had been.

The King gave no sign that he did or did not believe any of this. In the end he scolded, in an incredibly professional curt manner, the General for not at least giving them any warning about tests that could potentially open the world to extra-dimensional incursions. He also paid Vickers a backhanded compliment about how good it was that he was capable of surviving in such a strange world with no preparation. Much less that he could make it all the way to the capital in the dead of winter. Then he made it clear that Vickers's disruption of the public peace, and attempt on multiple guards lives was something he should avoid in the future.

Vickers apologized for the disruption he'd caused. He explained how he'd been traveling as a bodyguard for a merchant until he'd gotten his griffin to be able to fly, and had been attacked several times as a result. He even told them about the bandit camp he'd destroyed. James didn't know it, since Vickers had been surprisingly tight lipped with him. But Vickers was telling MOST of the truth about his journey.

James didn't really want the full truth. He'd prefer plausible deniability.

The General apologized for not keeping the King updated on their attempts at figuring out a way around James's predicament. He also apologized profusely for the mayhem that Vickers had caused and promised to reprimand the people who'd created the safety protocols that had allowed such a mishap to even occur in the first place. James watched the Colonel shift a bit behind the General when he said that.

In the mean time the General gave the King a promise that Vickers would be on his best behavior, and that should the King feel the need to pass judgment on the man, they would accept whatever it was. The King in turn, opted simply to keep the man on house arrest until they were capable of confirming his story and determining whether or not the man had caused any other issues since arriving in the world.

By the time it was done, James had the feeling that he'd seen a whole lot of.... nothing.... occur between the two nations/worlds.

And yet he also felt as if something had changed. The king spoke to him afterwords, and James got the sense that he was being held at arms length.

He got the sense that the King hadn't bought any of their bullshit.

And he couldn't blame him for it either.

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After the meeting Kela had given orders to the guard. The other Captains, and the Sergeants distributed the orders, and later that night Kela met with the people she'd summoned in one of the Barracks common rooms on the castle grounds.

She looked at the arrayed soldiers before her with a bit of pride. Mostly because they were taking it seriously. But also because most of them were other werewolves. But not all of them. There were also more than a few mountain gnomes, and a handful of other beast-folk known for their sense of smell. Once they'd all arrived she got to the matter at hand.

"All right!" She said, grabbing their attention. "Do you all know what you've been called here for?"

They all murmured for a moment. Then someone from the back, a gnome by the sound, yelled out a joke.

"Because the watch hounds couldn't track down an escaped prisoner ma'am?" The person said to a mix of laughter.

Kela let them have the moment. Then answered.

"Close." She said. "You're at least thinking in the right area." She pointed at her nose. "We need people with keen senses of smell. We have a slight issue."

That drew more murmurs.

"As you all may have heard, especially if you've been on rotation at the summoning room. The people from the summoned hero's home world have been capable of reopening the God's Door and sending things through." Most of them nodded their heads, though there were some gasps. She gestured at her still regrowing fur. "Some of you also heard about the little scuffle last night." More murmurs. "Well, apparently the people on the other side had a bit of an issue with their side of things. A couple of people got brought through unintentionally. And unfortunately they got scattered very badly. The man from last night was one of them, and apparently he ended up damn near in South Estland."

The murmurs were even louder now. She held up her hand to silence them.

"We're going to help find them. And if they're still alive, bring them to the capital so we can keep em safe until their people can get them back home. Just like the hero." She pulled the pistol out of her pouch. Then she copied James's motions and pulled the magazine out and pulled the slide back. "This is how." She handed it to the soldier nearest to her. "Take a deep sniff. Smell the chemicals and the other scents on that. Then pass it around." She handed the magazine to another one. "Same for this. When we're done here, I'm getting both of those back. Then we're going to deploy all of you to the different cities throughout our country."

Some of the soldiers began to talk in hushed whispers, not all of them happy.

"Relax, it's only for a week or two at each location. If you smell those scents, you're to track them down, and bring them in. Preferably in a more peaceful manner than occurred last night." That at least got some laughs. "Then we'll bring you home. That's all, a simple sniff and retrieve mission." She pointed back towards where the joker from earlier had been. "Just like the guard dogs and the prisoner. Hopefully with a bit more competence though." That drew more laughs.

A little over an hour later she got the pistol and the magazine back. Then she dismissed them for the night and told them to settle any affairs they needed to. They'd be leaving in two days.

With that settled she dropped her gear off at her room in the castle. Informed the King, who was brooding in his study. Then she changed into some normal clothes and went to see Jurl and the children.

It had been too long since she'd seen them.

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James flopped down on the bed, exhausted after a day of politicking between his Command and the King.

Amina sat next to him, wringing her hands.

After a moment James placed his hand on top of hers.

"You okay?" He asked.

She looked at him. Then she looked away. James rolled over so that he was facing her. After a moment she spoke.

"You lied today." A statement, not a question. "You lied to my father. About how that man got here."

James sat up. His guess had been right. They hadn't bought it.

He stayed silent for a moment. He looked down when he answered. "Yeah. Yeah I did."

"Why?"

He thought hard, letting out a long breath as he did. "To keep the peace?" He mused. Then he answered more honestly. "Because Vickers is a killer. You can tell just by looking him in the eyes. Hell, I bet that's why Kela attacked him." He took a deep breath. "Because he's the guy I warned your dad about all those months ago when he first spoke with my people."

"Then why would you try to hide that?" She asked.

James looked at her with concern. "Because...." He started. He looked away for a moment. Then looked back. "Because I'd hoped that I would be wrong about them. And him being here tells me that I wasn't. So I'm trying to give my people a chance to rewind things a bit and do it the right way. Maybe give em a chance to un-fuck themselves a bit."

She gripped his hand tightly. "You're doing this to protect them?"

"No. I'm doing this to protect this place and its people. To protect you, and Kela and Veliry, and... I don't know, Steve, and Mela and Tilo. Everyone here." He said while gesturing at everything around them. "To give my people a chance to avoid repeating the same cycle they've been stuck in for their entire history." He replied.

"What if you're wrong about this too?" She asked.

He looked at her, his eyes showing a weariness that would have looked in place on someone much older. Then he smiled weakly.

"Let's just... burn those bridges when we cross em." He said before flopping back. "And hope that I'm not."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (119/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/twfomz/wait_is_this_just_gate_118/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: It aint Covid. W00t W00t!Still feeling shitty though. So here's a light chapter.

Enjoy

\~

Vickers hopped on his right leg cursing. Then he flopped into the snowbank at the side of the stable.

The door swung open wider and Kela stepped out, pistol clutched awkwardly in her right hand. Smoke rose from the end of the barrel in wisps that curled into the night air. She stopped just a few yards away from him and looked down at him with pity.

By reflex Vickers pulled the lone tourniquet from his belt pouch and fastened it to his leg just below the knee.

He groaned. Then spoke. "Did you just shoot me with my own pistol?" He asked. He wasn't sure if he was angry, surprised, or scared. But mostly he was embarrassed.

"Looks that way." She said as she inspected the item in question. "Harder than James makes it look. Plus yours is smaller, can barely get my finger on the trigger."

"Pretty sure you broke my leg." He said through gritted teeth.

She seemed less shocked by that statement than he'd expected.

"So even the smaller ones can do that kind of damage?" She grinned, then placed the pistol back into the pouch she'd put it in earlier. "Interesting."

"How'd you know I was coming this way?" He asked.

"Saw you on the griffin. Remember?" She gestured at the snow next to him. "Toss the bundle, the sword, all that." She pulled her sword from its sheath. "This is over."

Vickers didn't exactly see a lot of other options. He tossed the sword and made to toss his bundled up jacket. But when he did he made sure to rapidly squeeze the end of the sleeve three times.

It sent all of its current data, footage included, with high priority through the drone network. Then the jacket's system purged itself of everything.

He tossed the jacket to the side. Then he leaned back into the snow as the other guards began to catch up.

Somewhat to his surprise, the wolf he'd stabbed was jogging with them. He was cradling his jaw and holding it shut.

Kela looked at the injured wolf.

"You alright Sergeant?" She asked.

The wolf pointed at Vickers, then lifted his head to show her the injury. Then he spoke, slowly and weakly.

"Hurts." Said the wolf. "But I'll live. Things are just gonna taste funny for a while. No silver though."

Kela simply nodded at him.

Vickers raised his hands up.

"You guys wouldn't happen to have lawyers, would ya?" He asked.

Then he was being hauled away.

\----------

James walked quickly through the halls with Amina and Veliry. Marcos was still in their room inspecting the stone and the box it had been in when he'd opened it. Several of the guards were marching along behind them, hands still on weapons.

James had quickly thrown on a shirt and checked his bottomless bags for his weapons. Both of them had still been there, right where he'd left them. So, he'd put on his belt and holster before they'd headed out. Amina had her sword and shield.

They reached the main entrance at the same time as the guards opened them and rushed in. They were hauling a large, muscular, man between them. His left leg was hung limply, and he cursed every time it got jostled.

"Motherfuckers!" The large man said

James's head cocked sideways, almost like Kela's might, when he heard the swear.

"That was English." He said, not really speaking to anyone in particular.

As the guards rounded a corner, headed for the healing ward, one of the guards accidentally tripped on the man's foot, causing another bout of curses.

"Watch the fuckin' leg guy! Jesus Christ! It's fuckin' broken!"

"Holy shit that was English." James said to himself.

He turned to the main door just in time to see Kela walking in with a pair of saddle bags draped over her shoulder. She looked like she'd just run through a house fire.

"Kela." He began. "What the fuck happened? Who the hell is that guy? Why's he speaking English?" He asked.

Amina had questions too. "What were those shots we heard? Was that gun fire?"

Kela held up a singed hand to silence them both, then handed the bags to one of the other guards.

"Take those to the mages please." She said to them. The guard nodded then turned to leave. She looked back at them. "Let's talk about this in private. Plus I need to get my armor off."

They followed her to her room. There they saw the damage she'd taken.

The plating of her armor had been heated up enough that it had scorched the leather and cloth padding underneath. Her sword had been heated up enough that the blade now had a rainbow like finish. Kela bent it a bit and shook her head when it snapped. Then she went over to one of her dressers and pulled out a tub of salve and began rubbing it on her hands, and then gently on the base of one of her ears.

After a few minutes of watching her gingerly recover from whatever she'd been through, she walked over and sat at the table across from them. When she did, she reached into a pouch and placed a pistol on the table.

James looked at it in confusion. He gestured at it and she nodded. So, he picked it up and inspected it. First he dropped the mag, then ejected the chambered round.

"Where the hell did you get a Glock fifty seven?" He asked as he counted the rounds in the magazine. Fifteen left. But he'd only heard three shots. Where were the other two?

"From that man you saw them dragging away." She held her hand out and James instinctively handed the pistol back, grip first. "James. Things might get a bit tricky for a while."

Then she told them what had happened.

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Vickers woke the next day feeling significantly better. His leg was wrapped in some of the glowing green bandages that he'd come to recognize as being lightly magical. He went to touch the leg, and that was when he realized that his hands were shackled. So was his right ankle, now that he noticed it.

"Ah. You're awake?" Said a voice to his left.

He looked over and saw Choi sitting in a chair nearby. The young soldier yawned and stretched. Then he sat forward.

"So." Choi started. "Seal? Green beret? Hell, you SAF or something?" He thought for a second. "Nah. Not SAF. Not with that accent. Boston or New York?"

"I'm not gonna talk about that CAPTAIN." Vickers responded icily. "And you know why."

James nodded as he considered this.

"Right. Well at least that tells me that your on America's side." He said after a minute. "But yea, Opsec and all that. That's fair."

James stood up and moved his chair closer to the bed. Then he whispered.

"So." James looked around for a minute, almost as if looking for a camera. "There must have been a mishap at the site back on Earth right?"

Vickers looked at the young man curiously. After a minute James repeated the question.

He enunciated each word slowly, still whispering. "There. Was. A. Mis. Hap. At. The. Site. Back. On. Earth. Right?" He said.

"Right." Vickers agreed, understanding what he was getting at now. "Right, yeah. A mishap." He said.

"Good." James said, nodding. "Now look. I'm still on Earth's side. I'm still a soldier, and a patriot and blah blah blah." He said. "But we, both of us, are in a world of shit now. And a good chunk of it is your fault." He pointed at Vickers as he said the last bit. "But you're in a way worse position then I'm in. Now, you got the fact that Kela swung first goin' for you. But other than that, you're in the shit dude."

"What?" He asked. "And you're gonna save me?"

"I'm gonna try." James answered. "But you're gonna have to work with me here. They're only letting me talk to you because they think I can convince you to talk to them. But in order to sell it, you're gonna have to actually talk to me."

Vickers didn't like any of this.

"First things first though?" James said as he pulled his phone out of his pocket. "The colonel sent you didn't she?" He asked. He waited for a response. "Oh come on man. That woman is a grade A, asshole. At least let me have this much."

Vickers sighed. "Yeah. Yeah she did."

James smiled. "See. Now we're gettin places. This is gonna be fun." He held the phone up, Vickers saw that he was talking a selfie with Vickers behind him. He held up his middle finger. "God. It's gonna be so nice to have someone who gets all my references again."

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Colonel Muhammed was sleeping in her room at the tertiary site when her phone rang.

She cursed as she woke, then looked at the clock built into the lamp. Two AM.

She picked up the phone.

"Muhammed." She said simply. The person on the other end challenged her. Her still half asleep brain struggled to remember the phrase. "Ugh. Fuck. Um. Green men in purple suits with raspberry sherbet ice cream. Jesus Christ don't you know what fucking time it is here?"

The person on the other end spoke for a bit. Then she sagged.

"Fuck." She said as she heard the information. She sighed before adding. "Let the General know that I can be back at APG tomorrow."

The other person spoke some more.

"Understood." She said before hanging up.

She had half a mind to throw the phone at the wall.

It was gonna be a long couple of days.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (118/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tu0prj/wait_is_this_just_gate_117/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Confusion abounds. Also, I have a cold, (and maybe the rona). So, if posts become erratic, it's just because I feel like shit.

Enjoy.

\~

For the first time in her life, Kela felt weaker than her non-werewolf counterparts.

The stinging pink mist that the man had left behind in his wake had driven her near to unconsciousness. The stinging, burning, agonizing fumes singing her nostrils eyes and throat as if she'd been doused in acid. Where her skin had been burned by the man's shield the gas caused another burning sensation that made her want to claw her skin off. The other werewolves were in a similar state as well.

The humans, orcs, and especially dwarves on the other hand? They had only needed a few minutes to recover. Their eyes had watered, and they'd spent several minutes crouched over coughing. But once they'd left the radius of the pink fumes they had recovered quite quickly.

The griffineers had been quick to chase after the man, staying in the sky to avoid any more unexpected tricks. But the initial plan to capture him had failed.

Kela had been on the verge of recovering, wiping the vomit of her face, when a guard who wasn't a part of the arresting party had run up to them.

There was trouble in the castle.

She cursed the bad luck. Then instructed the men on what to do in her absence. Lieutenant Kroll took over in her place.

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James fell over onto his hands and knees and vomited onto the floor.

The guards kept their weapons trained on him as Amina rubbed his back.

"James are you alright?" She asked. "What happened?"

"ARE YOU JAMES CHOI?" Marcos yelled at him as he spit the last bits of his dinner out. James had never heard the old mage so animated before.

"What?" He asked.

"Are you James Choi?" He repeated.

When James looked back up, he saw that both of the mages still had the glow of magic about them. But unlike before it wasn't multiple colors. Marcos was glowing bright orange, and Veliry was glowing the dark blue, bordering on black, that meant she was about to cast death bolts at him.

"Of course I'm me." He said as he rolled over onto his butt. "Who else would I be?"

"Whose consciousness stone was that?" Veliry asked, the glow in her eyes and hands not wavering at all. "Who was in your mind James?"

"Is that what that was?" He asked. His head felt like it was going to split open. He looked at his hand and saw that it was empty. Then he saw the stone on the floor across the room. Trails of wispy purple smoke rose off of it. "What the fuck happened?"

"Who got into your mind?" Veliry asked again.

He looked at Amina. She was looking into his eyes with a mixture of concern and fear.

"It was." He started. But his head. No. His mind, hurt when he tried to think about it. "It was the agency." He said after a moment.

He heard the soldiers take a step forward. The luminescence of the two mages intensified.

"Are you James Choi?" Both of them asked at the same time.

James fought not to throw up again.

"Of course I'm me." He said. "What happened?"

"You were just affected by a compulsion ward to grab a hold of a consciousness stone." Veliry countered. "One that you yourself admit connected you to the Agency? For all we know you're some kind of monster from the abyss who's using James's face to hide. TELL ME WHO YOU ARE!"

Veliry's eyes flared brighter. Her fingers began arcing little black sparks between the fingers.

"I'm just James." He replied weakly. His head still throbbed with pain. "I'm just James Choi. ^(Specialist. United States... Ar-")

Then he passed out.

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Vickers ran.

He knew they were behind him. He could hear the yells of the foot soldiers that the wolf had brought with her. Could hear the squawks and cries of the griffins flying above him.

So he ran.

His eyes still stung from the gas grenade he'd activated, his back burning from where it had been touching him before he could pull it out and drop it. But the chill of the winter air was doing a lot to ease the discomfort as he ran.

His head hurt. His back hurt. His elbow throbbed from where it had hit the wolf's back plating. His ankles hurt from where she had thrown him.

But he still ran.

His advantages? The density of the city proper. The fact that the only ones who knew what he looked like were currently recovering from tear gas. That they didn't know where he was going.

Oh yeah. There was also the fact that he was one of the deadliest people on his world.

Though the wolf had made him reconsider whether or not that meant anything in this world.

His pride stung a bit at the ass whooping she'd just handed him.

But he could deal with all that later.

For now, he just had to run.

They'd taken his shield right off of his arm. His sword from its sheath. And he'd dropped the pistol.

Seeing the wolf put it into one of her pouches had made his heart drop. A few shots from that could have cleared almost all of his pursuers out, save the other wolves maybe.

But that was a problem for later.

He ran down a narrow alley, past a group of drunk carousers. One of them shouted something at him as he passed.

He took just a second to peak behind him. The griffins were still above him. One swooped down lower towards him.

He dove into the bar that he assumed the drunks had come from.

And pulled another ringed canister from the back of his jacket.

The people of the bar all stopped what they were doing and looked at him for a moment. He smiled at them awkwardly.

"Cold weather eh?" He asked. Most of them simply went back to their drinking. But not all of them.

Another problem for later.

He pulled the ring on the smoke grenade and set it on the bar as he walked up. The bartender looked at it curiously, and was about to say something, when thick white smoke began spraying out of the top.

"WHAT IN THE HELLS!" One of the patrons a few seats down yelled.

Vickers was already pulling his jacket off and bundling it up as the smoke began to fill the room.

He placed the bundled jacket on the bar top, then grabbed one of the tankards of ale that one of the now evacuating people had been drinking. He took a deep swig before pouring it all over himself.

A man was running past, a dwarf from the looks of it. But his broad shoulders were all Vickers cared about. He hammered his fist into the man's face as he got near, and before he'd even hit the ground had wrestled the coat off of him. He heard the front door of the bar slam open and through the haze of smoke, saw the guards begin to enter.

He threw the new coat on and grabbed his jacket. Then used a bit of the beer still on his shirt to muss up his hair.

He hunched a bit and held the tankard in one hand while shuffling out at a light jog.

The two soldiers didn't even look at him as he passed.

"Move aside!" One of them shouted as he passed. Vickers pointed at the back of the bar room through the smoke. One of the guards nodded and began running that way.

When he got outside he kept the act up. One of the griffins was perched on the roof of the building on the opposite side of the alley.

He didn't have to look to know that the others were likely on the roof of the bar itself. Plus, doing so might have blown his cover if he had. He fell in with one of the other clusters of escaping patrons as they moved away from the place.

He rounded a corner and broke off from them, tossing the tankard away as he did.

Then he ran directly into one of the wolves. The one that had pulled his shield off of his arm before he'd deployed the gas.

The werewolf was still wheezing from the gas, and had a hand on their nose.

But the eyes recognized him.

The wolf reached for their sword. But not as fast as Vickers was with his knife.

His right hand drew the blade from the back of his belt while his left hand clamped down on the wolf's sword hand, stopping them from drawing the blade. The wolf was strong and he knew that he wouldn't be able to stop them for long, but he only needed a second.

His right hand flashed forward and punched the blade in under the wolf's helmet strap. The wolf's eyes widened in shock as blood spurted out of its mouth.

Vickers twisted the handle sideways harshly and ripped the blade out sideways. Then he planted his elbow, the non-injured one, on its chest and pushed it back into the snow. It fell with a gurgle. He reached down and took its sword from it. Then he kicked the wolf over, hoping to see his shield. But it was just a standard wooden one.

He heard a shout behind him, and when he looked, he saw one of the griffins flying towards him.

"Fuck." he muttered to himself. Then he began running again.

Luckily, Tom's stable was only a block or two away now.

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James woke up after only a few minutes.

He'd been moved back to the bed and had his armor off now. Veliry and Marcos were still in the room, as well as two other guards. Amina was sitting on the edge of the bed next to him when he woke up.

"James?" She asked, hand on his chest.

"Yeah? Did I pass out?" He asked.

"Yes. Are you alright?"

"My head hurts." He said. "Can I get some water?"

She reached over to the nightstand and held a glass of water to his lips. He drank almost the whole thing.

"What happened? What was that stone? What'd it do to me?" He asked.

"That was a consciousness stone." Veliry interrupted. "It took your mind out of your body and put it under their control. Let them root through it at will."

"Yeah, they explained that last part. Kinda." He admitted.

"And while they were in there, they used your body as a voice to send a message." Marcos said.

"What?" That was news. "What the fuck did they say?"

"In a minute." Marcos said. "Prove that you are who you say you are."

"How the hell am I supposed to do that?" He asked.

"Tell us something that they wouldn't know." Veliry answered.

James looked at them dumb founded.

"Guys." He said. "I'm from a different world. Almost everything I know is something they wouldn't know." He thought for a second. "Also, if they were just rooting around in my head wouldn't they theoretically know that stuff too?"

"Shit." Veliry said. "That's a good point."

"Besides. I could be wrong." He began. "But I think I might have stonewalled em a bit."

Amina was about to ask what he meant.

Then they heard three loud pops from outside the window.

James's head snapped that direction.

"What the hell? Was that gunfire?" He looked over at his gear in the corner of the room. "My rifle's still in there, right?"

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Wait, is this just GATE? (117/?)

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Writer's note: This is it until next week. The game of cloak and dagger, or cat and mouse (wolf and seal), and all that other stuff officially kicks off next week. I hope y'all are as excited (or in my case dreading) the fleshing out of THE AGENCY.

In the mean time. Enjoy.

PS: You should 100% imagine Kela moving like something out of an Anime fight sequence.

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Kela signalled to the soldiers with her.

They split into five groups of three. Several of the groups had werewolves in them, one group was entirely composed of griffin riders. One group took each side of the tavern, and the last one took to the air on their mounts.

Kela had gone back to the castle and inquired with one of her fellow captains as to whether there had been any unexpected activity in the summoning room. The captain had confirmed that there hadn't, and that Earth had only sent a handful of items for the King and kingdom to make use of, as well as some things for the hero.

Kela had requested that a party be formed for her to check up on something.

It had taken her a while to place the scent she'd smelled on the way back. But once it had clicked in her mind she had wondered how she could have ever forgotten it. She'd smelled it numerous times. She'd even been

killed for a bit by the thing that had made the smell. Had smelled it on James numerous times, especially after the grabber clan battle.

But how was it here? How did someone else have it?

She stepped through the doors of the tavern. The hustle and bustle of the patrons and the staff seemed to freeze. The bartender and servers continued working, but they paused for a moment to look at her, and when they resumed working they did so quietly. But everyone looked at her. It wasn't too often that a captain of the guard walked into a bar fully armed and armored.

The man in question was seated at the bar itself, drinking a pint of ale and slowly eating some stew. He looked at her like everyone else, and seemed to follow the mood shift as well.

"Everyone out." She commanded. Her voice was low, but the tone would suffer no questioning.

Everyone began throwing their jackets on and grabbing whatever small things they had brought with them. Some of them headed up the stairs to their rooms, but most of them began streaming past Kela and out the front door. The large man followed suit.

He was smooth, whoever he was. Despite his size, he knew how to blend in. But she knew he was only acting.

As he made to pass her she raised her hand, palm out to him.

"Not you." She said.

The man stopped in his tracks. People gawked at him as they passed.

"Something wrong captain?" The man asked in an unfamiliar accent.

"That's what I'm here to find out." She replied.

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"What are your plans here Captain Choi?" The Agency asked him.

"I don't fuckin' know." James admitted. "Killing you fucks is definitely on the list though." When he spoke, it still seemed to be occurring from inside his head. But then, he thought, maybe all of this was in his head. He couldn't exactly rule it out.

"Cute." The Agency replied. "But really. Why are you here?"

"Here?" He asked sarcastically. "Because you did some bullshit with a magic rock."

"You know what we mean?" It responded.

"Oh. You mean in this world? Cause I was summoned. Past that, I don't have a fuckin clue." He hoped it sounded as venomous as he wanted it to be.

"Why were you summoned?"

James didn't say anything. He wasn't going to play their games.

"Hmmmm." The voice said. "YOU... AREN'T.... GOING... TO PLAY.... OUR... GAMES!" It said loudly.

James's 'head' ached with every word. Had they just pulled that from his mind? The pain spiked again as he had that thought.

"Yes." The agency answered without being asked. "We did pull that from you."

If James had had a jaw, it would have dropped. So this was that kind of situation.

"Why are you here?" It repeated. "What are your plans?"

"Fuck you." James answered.

"We can dig deeper Captain." It replied. "The deeper we have to dig. The more it will..... **HURT."**

James felt like his head was about to explode at the word "hurt".

"Who is Joey?" It asked. Then it paused. "Ah, the little brother. In a different world. That would be useful if he were in this world. But he's not."

"DON'T YOU TALK ABOUT MY FAMILY!" He shouted from his mind.

"Oh relax." It said. "You mortals are all so feisty. Like we said, he's not in this world so we can't even do anything with that info. Waste of resources to even bother."

He felt them dig again. He focused as hard as the pain would let him.

"What do you want?" He asked, trying to get them out. The pain dulled, but only a little.

"We already told you." It said, though James still felt the pain of their intrusion. "We want to know if you're a threat to our plans. Or if you're just an inconvenience."

The pain worsened. James thought as hard as he could. *I'm fuckin gonna be.*

"Cute." The Agency replied.

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"Who are you?" Kela asked.

Vickers knew, from the question, that his cover was blown. He should have backed off the second he realized who was in front of him on his way into town. He'd seen werewolves before, and knew from a few sources that they had great senses. He should have played it safe.

But he'd been riding the high that flying always seemed to bring him. He'd been tired. And he'd been caught off guard and a little excited to see the very cause of his journey here. So he'd gotten sloppy.

A rookie mistake.

His hands went into his pockets. To anyone else, it would probably look like he was just trying to relax. But he saw the werewolf's hand move toward the sword on her hip. A smart move considering he was actually reaching into his coin pocket, searching for the fat little silver coins he had in there.

"I'm just a traveler." He replied, knowing that she wouldn't buy it.

"Oh?" She said, head tilting. "And where are you traveling from?"

Yeah. She hadn't bought it.

"A long ways away from here." He replied. Several of the silver coins slipping into the spaces between his fingers. "I doubt you've ever heard of it."

"Try me." She replied.

"Boston?" He asked sarcastically.

The two of them stared at each other for what felt like an hour.

"Well." She began. "You're right. Never heard of it." Her hand was on the grip of her sword now. "How did you get here?"

"Didn't you see me earlier?" He asked. "I was riding a griffin."

"That's another thing." She said quickly. "How did you get a griffin? They don't have them in your world."

"Sure they do." He replied. "It's just that over there griffin is a last name, not a flying kitty-hawk."

To her credit the werewolf had no tell. She didn't shift her stance. Her eyes didn't widen. Her ears didn't flatten.

The sword hand moved so fast that she probably could have cut any normal person in half before they ever realized that there was a problem.

But Vickers wasn't a normal person.

He was a goddam Navy SEAL.

The fact that she wasn't trying to kill him only helped.

His right hand flicked out of his pocket at the exact same moment that he dove backwards. The coins between the fingers flying out to strike the wolf wherever they could. Most of them bounced noisily off of her armor. But one coin struck right at the base of one of her exposed ears. There was a slight sizzle noise, and a wisp of smoke, before the coin bounced off.

It wasn't much, but it had the desired effect.

Kela jumped to the side instinctively to avoid any more projectiles, not that there were any, and clamped a hand to the affected ear.

Before she could press the attack again, Vickers had his shield in front of him, and his pistol in his right hand. He knew damn well that he wouldn't keep up with her in a sword fight. He was good with a sword. But based on what he'd just seen of her opening attack, she would outclass him.

But a pistol? Well, it might not have any silver bullets, but it was still his better option.

What he hadn't accounted for, was her speed.

He'd seen the speed of her opening swing, but anyone could swing a sword fast. Hell he'd bet money that any of the Red Sox could swing a sword faster than her.

But her movement speed, her footwork, her overall mobility? That was what caught him off guard.

She'd dodged to the side to avoid any more coins, a good move. He'd expected her to either charge from there, or recenter herself between him and the door.

What he hadn't expected was for her to leap directly up, plant her foot on one of the roof beams, and then leap downward at him, and all faster than he would have even been able to close the distance.

Nothing wearing full plate and leather armor should have been able to move that fast.

It was all he could do to get the shield up in time.

Luckily, he knew that the shield would surprise her right back.

Her sword hit the shield with a loud ring.

Then there was a flare of bright orange light, and Kela yelped in pain.

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"Why did you try to kill Amina?" James asked, he imagined that he'd be gritting his teeth through the pain. But he didn't have teeth right now.

"We were hired to do so." The Agency said nonchalantly. "Who is this Rick Astley person that you keep trying to push in our way?" It asked.

"Oh god. You can't look in there." James replied, lying. "He's too important."

There was a pause. An unexpected side effect of the forced distraction was that now the song was stuck in his head. Hopefully that made this easier to sell.

"A singer is important to you?" It asked, a hint of exasperation in its otherwise monotonous voice. "This is a.... meemee? Maim? Meem?" Another pause, the pain rose as it dug again. "Oh. Funny. But unfortunate for you." It said finally.

James felt the pain rise, higher than it had before.

"Stop." He said after a moment. "Stop please." Even in his head, it sounded pathetic. "Please.... stop."

"Stop playing around Captain Choi. We want to know your plan while you're here." It responded. "The sooner you tell us the sooner we finish up here."

"What happens when you 'finish up'?"

"Depends on your answers." It said.

"And what if the answers aren't what you want to hear?" He asked, glad that the pain had abated, though not entirely.

"For now? Nothing." It replied. "But if that's the case than we'll be forced to prevent you from interfering, whatever method that requires."

"But you won't do anything now?" He asked. That was all he needed to know. "Because you can't, can you?"

"Of course we **CAN."** It replied and the pain shot through him again.

James braced himself, metaphorically speaking, and rode through the pain. He focused on every bullshit, overplayed, annoying, meme'd up, song and soundbite he could. Some of which had existed longer than he'd been alive. When the pain wasn't too much he focused on the images themselves.

NOBODY EXPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION! He thought as loudly as he could while imagining the three Spanish inquisitors bursting into the void that he was currently occupying.

"What in the hells is happening?" The voice said. Its voice was different, but it was subtle. It was still monotonous, but the pitch had changed just the tiniest bit. "What? Rice fields? What are these jumbled..... Oh okay. More nonsense. We'll fix that."

The pain went higher.

"THE PAIN!" He exclaimed into the space. "IT'S OVER NINE THOUSAND!!!!" He focused as hard as he could on whatever joke he could manifest through the pain.

Whenever this is over. I'm gonna hunt you fucks down and kill all of you. He thought as the pain continued to climb.

And he hoped they caught that one too.

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Vickers watched the pile of broken tables and chairs, the dust and powdered wood obscuring the form of the now scorched wolf captain as she picked herself up.

Kela coughed as she got to a knee. The fur on her legs, hands, and ears was scorched off. The skin underneath was raw. But the majority of the burn had been taken by her armor. To her credit, the sword was still in her hand, though the wood of the debris sizzled and scorched wherever the blade touched it as she recovered.

"A rebounding shield? With a fire enhancement?" She said as she pressed the tip of the blade into the ground and pushed herself up. "Unexpected. But doable." As the dust began to settle Vickers saw the yellow of her eyes as they focused on him. Her teeth glared white in the half-lit gloom of the empty bar. "Only now I'm angry." She said, though it came out almost like a growl.

Good. Vickers thought. *Anger is easy to manipulate.*

She launched her sword at him so fast that for a second it seemed almost to disappear. He raised the shield to intercept it. But then he realized too late that it was a feint.

The wolf had launched herself too. She'd quickly planted her feet against the wall behind her and sprung off at a low, fast angle. Her claws were extended in front of her.

As the shield rose up to stop the flying blade, his right hand unveiled itself with the pistol.

Kela's eyes widened at the sight of it. But she'd already known that he would have it.

And she'd had plenty of time since meeting James to think of ways around his weapon of choice. And doing so was just a force of habit when it came to new weapons.

As she flew towards him, and as his hand brought the pistol up to fire, she slammed one of her extended hands into the ground beneath her. She hit it as hard as she could at a moment's notice.

KRACKKRACK!

The pistol fired twice and, to Vickers' surprise, hit nothing except the wooden floor of the building. His eyes had tracked the wolf as she'd moved, despite her massive amounts of speed. He tried bringing the weapon around to where she was now launching off of the side of the bar.

Then the sword struck his shield. There was a loud gonging sound as metal struck metal. Then the shield flared bright orange and sent the sword flying back exactly where it had come from. But the noise and light had caused his eyes to close for just a second.

That was all she needed.

When he opened his eyes again he had just a fraction of a second to see the armored form of the werewolf already inside his reach, arms extended again..

He tried to jump up away from the extended claws.

Tried to bring the pistol down to aim at her head.

Tried to bring the shield down and across to maybe get another rebound to go off and send her flying.

But she was just too damn fast.

Her hands wrapped around his ankles as she bowled him over. He had the sense of being lifted and held. Almost like someone bringing a baseball bat up and resting it on their shoulder.

He brought his elbow down on her back, trying desperately to do something to get her to release him.

But the elbow met another piece of armor plating, it made a sickening crunch as his adrenaline made him put way too much power into the strike. Whenever the adrenaline wore off, the pain of a likely broken elbow would suck something fierce.

But he didn't have time to think about that.

Before he could bring the pistol down for a point blank shot into her ribs, he was being swung. Once again it reminded him of a baseball bat. Then she released his ankles. And then he was flying.

He'd been thrown plenty of times in training, and from impacts while in vehicles or near explosions. Some of those last ones had left him hospitalized.

But those throws had only ever moved him a few feet, maybe a yard or two at worst.

This time, it was an actual full blown throw.

He flew past the spot where she'd crashed after his shield had rebounded her.

He flew past the bar, his bowl of stew still steaming in its bowl despite the ruckus.

Then he hit the tavern door and shattered it. His head rang and his back cried out in pain before he slammed down onto the ground. His shield was still on his arm, but somewhere during his flight he'd lost the pistol.

Before he could even catch his breath he was being grabbed by multiple sets of hands. He was shocked to see another werewolf looking down at him as it unbuckled and pulled the shield from his arm. The people handling him all had similar sets of armor to the wolf he'd just fought.

Surrounded the building. He thought, though his head was swimming now. *Yeah. I knew I shoulda been wary of this one.*

Vickers struggled feebly. Or at least that was what he wanted them to think.

"Lemme go." He said in a dazed voice. He was dazed, but years of head trauma had made this normal for him." Lemme go." He repeated as Kela walked out of the door. She bent down and picked up the dropped pistol that had landed next to the door. It disappeared into one of the pouches on her armor.

That's a problem. He thought as his hand managed to snake its way into one of his jacket pockets and into a small metal ring. One of the guards pulled his arm back up in front of him. Vickers used the maneuver to pull the metal ring out. Then the guards slapped a pair of metal shackles onto his wrists.

"This is gonna suck." He said.

Kela, now only a few steps away from him, spoke up. "Yes it is." She agreed. "You're going to have a lot of questions to answer when we get you t-"

She was cut off by a stream of pinkish gas that began spraying from the compartment in Vicker's jacket pocket. The gas stung the eyes and nostrils, stinking of ammonia and capsaicin extract. The guard behind Vickers was caught right in ground zero and began coughing and crying as the gas rose up around him. The werewolves both dropped to the ground and began clawing at their noses, leavind the last of the three guards around him by themselves.

Vickers used his shackled left hand, the right one still free thanks to the distraction, to punch the guard in the throat.

Then he started running, a trail of the burning pink gas following behind him for a while.

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"CEASE THIS INSOLENCE!" The agency yelled into his mind. Each word felt like a white hot poker being pressed into his brain.

"WORKIN' NINE TO FIVE! WHAT A WAY TO MAKE A LIVIN!" James yelled from his own mind.

"CEASE THIS! GIVE US THE INFORMATION WE DESIRE!" A new, grander wave of pain.

"WELLA EVERBODY'S HEARD! ABOUT THE BIRD!" Another stupid song from memes before his time, only pulled from memory because they were catchy and made his mom laugh, not because they actually meant anything to him.

"WHAT IS YOUR PLAN? WHAT IS YOUR OBJECTIVE? ^(How is he doing this?") More pain.

But James thought he heard a different voice say something. Or maybe it was the same voice. Or maybe just part of that main voice. Was "The Agency" a single torturer right now? Or was this some kind of hive mind thing?

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I DON'T KNOW BECAUSE EVEN IF YOU DID I WOULDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT!" He yelled, one of the few jokes from his time.

"WHY ARE YOU HERE? ^(Nobody has ever done this before.") There it was again. That smaller voice.

"Who is that?" He asked, not joking or distracting. In fact, he forced himself to sound calm despite the pain coursing through his.... well, everything.

"WHAT?" The voice asked, sending pain through him again. But it was clear that he'd caught it off guard.

"Who was that other voice?" He asked. "The smaller voice. They sounded more calm than you."

"NO ONE ELSE WAS SPEAKING TO YOU!" It yelled back angrily, the pain cascaded again. Then James heard it again. ^("The arch mages have arrived. Our time is up. What do you mean he just heard us?")

"HAHA!" James exclaimed. "I did hear someone. And it sounds like the cavalry has arrived."

"SILENCE! YOU INSOLENT HUMAN!"

The pain reached a level that James hadn't thought possible. It felt like his soul was on fire, and for all he knew maybe it was.

He summoned all his strength, if he even had any here, and put it into his response.

"NO!" He yelled back. "BECAUSE YOU ALREADY SHOWED YOUR HAND!" He felt as though he was staring someone in the eyes, though he still couldn't see anything. "You can't actually hurt me here. And what I think distracts from what you're looking for!"

^("How does he know that?") The small voice asked.

"I heard that." He said, feeling the smile spread across his nonexistent face.

^("What?")

Without saying anything, the agency made the pain rise again. James wanted to cry out. Wanted to beg for them to stop. But he couldn't. He had to show them.

He had to show them that he was, in fact, a threat.

He focused on not reacting in any way, except to speak.

"I am a threat to you." He said. "Look around in there. Tell me I'm lying."

The pain continued. It was like they had a volume knob that just kept spinning upward.

"I'm coming for you." He said.

Then something happened.

For just a brief moment James had an image of a dark room. He thought that maybe he shouldn't have been able to see in the room. That it was meant to be pitch black. But he'd just spent however long this had lasted in a completely dark void of whateverness.

So he could see, however faintly, a group of figures. Not all of them were humanoid, he noticed in the brief flash of vision, but most of them were.

And they were surrounded by doors.

The one directly in front of him was wearing a look of anger and confusion on their face that made him smile.

"I see you." He said as he looked that one in the eyes.

Then color flooded back into his vision, and physical sensations returned as he looked up from Amina's bed to see her worried face as she lightly slapped his cheek.

"JAMES!" She said with fear. "COME BACK PLEASE!"

His eyes widened as he shot bolt upright on the bed.

Amina was kneeling on the bed next to him, and both Veliry and Marcos were standing next to the bed, arms and eyes glowing numerous colors. They were surrounded by guards who had weapons ready.

"What the fuck just happened?" He asked.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (116/?)

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*Writer's note: Espionage time b@$&*es. CUE THE JAMES BOND MUSIC!!!*

Enjoy.

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James and Vickers actually arrived at the capital at almost the exact same moment.

In fact their timing, and the fact that they both came from through the city's southern region resulted in them arriving close enough that Vickers was able to see James riding into the city.

He'd landed Tom only a mile or so away from the outskirts of the Capital's southern residential district, startling a vendor who was wheeling their cart towards the city a little bit. He smiled at the man and nodded, ignoring the vendor's scowl at being caught off guard, and began trotting Tom toward the city.

As he approached he saw the group of travelers, the two drakes, the carriage with the werewolf on the coachman's seat, all riding together and chatting.

He had the feeling that he was looking at something he should recognize, so he pulled his jacket open and looked at the tablet hanging inside of the left side of it. He tapped on it, bringing up his intelligence files and then pulled up Captain Choi's dossier. He still disliked that the young Specialist had technically been promoted past him. But that was a problem for later, and preferably never.

He looked through the file, reading up on the finer details, and eventually pulled up a photo that Choi had sent command of his drake.

Then he looked back up at the riders only a hundred yards or so ahead of him. Then the picture.

It was definitely Choi's Drake.

But what was this black armor he was wearing?

Was that the princess sitting behind him, resting her head on his shoulder?

If so, then lucky lucky specialist. He thought.

Was that the prince riding next to him? The one that had attempted to exile him, and learned the hard way what a .45 could do to a kneecap?

Was that the werewolf that command had overheard Choi and the King talking about handing over to command for interrogation about Sergeant Odikowe's death? They hadn't told Choi that they'd listened in on that conversation even before Choi had accepted the call. But they had. They knew that the wolf was involved somehow. Why was Choi still working with them?

All these thoughts and more ran through his head as he casually tailed the group in front of him from on Tom's back.

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James was completely unaware of the tail they'd accidentally picked up.

But Kela's nose picked something up that she couldn't quite place.

It was a familiar smell. Her brain recognized it as something that she'd scented before. But it just wasn't clicking into place.

It didn't help that she was excited to be home. Excited not only to be back at the capital and the castle, but more importantly back where her family was. She fully intended to spend the night with Jurl and the pups, and turn in for debriefing in the morning.

But what was this smell? It had suddenly arrived out of nowhere, a gust of wind bringing it whipping across her nostrils unexpectedly. It came with the scent of sweat, and magic, and.... griffin.

She looked over to where Amina was telling a story of one of her campaigns. But it was a campaign that Kela had been part of, so she wasn't really listening. Mostly she used the turn of head to peak out of the corner of her eye looking backwards.

Sure enough there was a griffin riding a ways back. The rider was looking at something inside his jacket for a second. Then Kela had to turn back and laugh a bit at the story.

When had that man gotten there? The griffin meant he could have come from anywhere. But he hadn't been there a few minutes earlier.

Whoever he was, he was large. She could tell that even out of the thick coat he was wearing he would be a large muscular person.

But the smell coming off of him was her main question.

It smelled musty and sharp, with a hint of.... rotten egg? There was also some kind of chemical smell that came with it, almost like some of the solutions that Veliry had in her lab at the castle.

She sniffed deeply, focusing as much as she could.

Where had she smelled that before?

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Despite the fact that Vickers had been checking his tablet at the time, entering a quick message about seeing Choi for command, he saw Kela check him out from the corner of his eye.

So he covered by pulling out a piece of the salted beef from one of the packets in his jacket and began chewing on it.

When the party came to a slight fork in the road, the sign pointing one way for the castle and the other way for the merchant square, he took the one they didn't.

He paused for a second, as if considering which way to go, then headed right towards the merchant district. He saw, also out of the corner of his eye, the wolf look back at him for a moment.

He'd have to be careful of that one.

He knew where Choi and the others were headed. He could pick up their trail whenever he wanted to. But he needed to find a place to stay, and a place to keep Tom while he was here.

Choi, could wait until tomorrow. After all, he had more than enough footage of the young Captain and his group now.

Besides, his primary goal was scouting the Capital out.

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Kela heard the man's griffin stop and peaked back at him for just a moment. He turned off down the other street, and even though it made the logical part of her mind relax, the wolf part told her that she was still being hunted, and that the hunter was simply fading into the woods to approach from a different angle.

For all the trouble her wolf had caused her throughout her life; it had never been wrong when it came to sensing danger. And everything about that man was setting off warnings.

Plus there was that smell.

Jurl and the pups might have to wait for a night. She thought.

Artair told a crass joke. Something involving a Gnome cobbler and a wine bottle. Amina scolded him, and Kela chuckled.

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When James and Amina got back to their room there were several letters and packages waiting for them. Most of them were for Amina, things for the princess and General to look over and approve or else accept as gift.

However there were two letters and a small package for James as well.

The first was a letter from Gixelle, likely letting him know about Steve and Maxel's babies and what they'd ended up looking like. He set it aside for the morning.

The other he didn't recognize. It had a small green seal on it that had an image that looked like a scale pressed into it. It had the small black paper wrapped package tied to it. It smelled like cinnamon and something else. Peppermint? Whatever it was it smelled wonderful to him, and he felt himself drawn to it.

Amina was sifting through her deliveries as she undid her armor and filling the bathtub in her bathroom. She was talking about how nice it was to finally be home and in a real bed. He absently voiced agreements, mostly grunts, as his hand opened the sealed letter.

The seal broke easily, though the edge of the envelope's tongue nicked his thumb with a paper-cut. He pressed his thumb into his mouth and sucked on the small drop of blood that came off it as his other hand pulled the letter out.

It was just a small rectangle of parchment that read:

>**We would like to meet.**

And that was all.

That's not ominous at all. He thought sarcastically.

He pressed the letter to his nose and sniffed. The peppermint and cinnamon scent wasn't coming from the letter. He looked at the small black box curiously.

Amina said something, but he wasn't really paying attention.

Instead he grabbed the piece of twine around the box and undid the knot.

The box popped open as soon as the knot came undone, and James saw a small, round, dark stone inside. It looked like elemental obsidian. But it had a faint green shimmer too it, and when he looked he saw that the

energy inside wasn't red like the fire elemental's. Instead it was a dark bluish purple.

He didn't notice the faintly glowing purple rune on the inside of the box's lid.

He picked it up to take a closer look at it.

The second he did his body fell back onto the bed, his eyes rolling back into his head, and his hand clutched tightly around the stone in a fist.

Amina popped her head out of the bathroom to invite him in. But when she saw him on the bed she simply assumed that he had fallen asleep.

"Silly boy." She said to herself as she went back into the bathroom. "He didn't even get his boots off."

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James couldn't tell what had just happened.

One second he had been looking at something that had arrived in the mail while they'd been traveling. The next second he'd found himself immersed in complete darkness.

He couldn't see anything. He couldn't even tell if his eyes were open. He reached up to touch them to find out. But his hands..... didn't..... exist?

What the fuck? He thought.

He flailed. Or at least he told his body to flail. But he felt nothing. His limbs didn't hit anything. But he also didn't feel the wind move on them. In fact he didn't feel them either.

WHAT THE FUCK? He wondered, panic beginning to rise in his mind.

"You are the summoned hero, Captain James Michael Choi." Said a voice. It wasn't a question, just a statement. It seemed to come from everywhere simultaneously. But it wasn't loud.

Who the fuck are you? He meant to say the question. But instead it simply sounded within his mind. Despite that the speaker, or entity or whatever they were, still acknowledged it as though it had been spoken.

"We are THE **AGENCY.**" It replied.

The word "Agency" hurt inside of his head, despite the fact that he couldn't feel that either.

What the fuck is going on? Where am I? What do you want? He thought-spoke back at it.

"That is simple Captain Choi." The voice responded. "We would like to have a conversation as to what your plans for this world are. That way we can determine whether or not you're actually a threat to our plans. Or simply a temporary obstacle."

Wait. Your plans? You tried to kill Amina! He replied.

"Yes." It said coolly.

Then we're enemies. He shot back.

"For your sake, you should really hope not Captain Choi." It said.

When it said his name he felt a deep pain that reverberated throughout his entire "body" as it were.

"Otherwise." It continued. "This gets rather unpleasant for you. Now, let's begin our discussion."

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tu0prj/wait_is_this_just_gate_117/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (115/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/trf2dz/wait_is_this_just_gate_114/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Bit filler-ish again. But there's also a lot of time passing on this one. And a big development at the end.

Enjoy.

\~

"Just hold still." James said, focusing on the magic coursing through his hands.

"Seriously. This isn't necessary James." Amina said, struggling to pull her arm from his grip.

"Just hold still dammit. I can do this." He said, voice showing signs of stress.

"It's just a scratch." She said, for what had to be the third or fourth time now.

"That's why I have to do this." He replied, struggling to hold onto her wrist. "I need to learn on small stuff so that I'll know what to focus on when bigger injuries happen!"

He focused more energy into the healing spell that Veliry had been helping him learn. He'd already read the entire book on healing magic.

But for some reason he just couldn't get it to work. He was focusing on everything it had told him to focus on. He wasn't even thinking of any of the medical knowledge he had from earth. Why wasn't this working.

He couldn't see it, but his eyes were emitting a bright blue light.

Still the scratch on Amina's arm lingered, not fading in the slightest.

"Come on." He said to himself. He focused more energy. "Come on!"

"James." Amina said softly so that only he could hear it.

James looked up at her, eyes still glowing. She placed a hand on his shoulder. The light began to fade as he relaxed.

He let her wrist go as the light faded out of his eyes and hands.

"Dammit." He said.

She placed her other hand on top of his hands.

"It's all right." She said. He looked at her. Then she grinned and said. "Now watch someone who actually know how to do it."

Her hands glowed the amber color of healing magic. James watched with annoyance as the skin underneath quickly knit back into place and sealed itself, leaving the barest hint of a scar.

"See. You do it just like that." She said with a chuckle.

"That's not funny." He replied as she skipped away, back to her side of the area they were using to train. "I need to learn this stuff!" He yelled at her.

She grinned as she put her new helmet back on and picked her sword up off the ground.

"You've just managed to actually hit me in training for the first time ever." She said. "A big day for you darling. And yet, you're focused on not being able to cast healing magic yet." She waved a gauntleted finger at him. "Priorities. This is sword training, not magic class." She raised her training shield in front of her and lifted her sword. "Now back to it."

"That's still not funny." James remarked as he grabbed his sword off of the ground and rushed at her.

Kela and Artair both looked at each other. Kela shrugged. Artair rolled his eyes.

"I'm going to go catch us some dinner." He said as he stood up to leave. "Before I lose my appetite."

\---

When they finally arrived at Bayton, after almost a month and a half of slogging through the snow, the first thing James did was head towards Antonea's cafe. Amina, Kela, and Veliry were more than happy to follow him, though the three of them had to convince Artair to tag along.

Antonea was much the same as the last time James had seen him. The surly elf greeted him with a warm smile and a hug. He looked at Amina curiously before seeming to recognize her from her last visit. Amina explained the necessity of the previous trips secrecy. But Antonea understood, news of the Grinner's attempt had already reached far and wide well before then.

Antonea joined them for dinner, serving them some of the clam chowder personally before sitting down and joining in on the conversation. He told great stories from his travels before becoming a cook, as well as funny kitchen stories. James confirmed the news of the Elemental, though he spoke quietly.

The cafe was busy. Travelers on the road, and residents of the village seemed to flow through the small restaurant at a constant flow. Some sitting and eating, others grabbing baskets with their orders and heading out immediately. James was happy to see more than a few bowls of the chowder being eaten greedily by the customers.

Then, when dinner was done, James followed the elf back into the kitchen to show him the recipe he'd promised during their last visit. Amina followed him closely, wanting to see the new food for herself. Kela and Veliry weren't far behind, but stayed on the other side of the serving line to stay out of the way. Artair used the opportunity to escape back to the inn.

James asked the chef if he'd had the local fishers find some of the creatures he'd been looking for.

Antonea confirmed that he had, though he admitted some disgust at the weird looking things.

James looked at them. They were shrimp.....of a sort. They had an extra eye, placed right in the middle of their heads between the other two. Their tales were longer and had more of a curve to them, instead of simply folding inward they actually seemed to spiral. But they were definitely some kind of shrimp.

James grabbed some salt, butter and garlic, and prepped the shrimp-like creatures the way he would normal shrimp. He'd made shrimp plenty of times back home, so the recipe came simply to him, though shelling the spiraled creatures proved a bit of a trick at first. Then he used a needle to gut them. Then threw them into the hot garlic butter.

He only cooked a handful of them, enough for each of them to try one. Then when they were on the plate he grabbed a smeplie, mostly out of curiosity, and squeezed some of its juices onto one of them. He quickly popped the spiral shrimp into his mouth and chewed.

It was everything he'd expected it to be. The soft buttery shrimp flavor was spot on for back on earth. The smeplie juice was almost an exaggeration of the lime he might have used, and the few drops of juice mixed with the salt already on the shrimp was delicious. He gestured for the others to follow suit.

The results were exactly what he'd wanted. Amina and Antonea followed suit with the smeplie juice, Kela and Veliry ate them plain. But they all savored the delectable shrimp flavor.

"These little lake bugs taste that good?" Antonea asked.

"I guess they do." James replied as he finished the last little bite. "So, fresh water clams meant fresh water shrimp after all. Even if they're a bit weird looking."

"I can't wait to begin cooking these." Antonea said, already trying to copy James's preparation of the creatures.

"Well, that's all well and good." James said. "But that's not the recipe I wanted to show you. That was just a test to make sure that shrimp were actually a thing."

"Oh?" Antonea mused, hands already holding several of the creatures.

"No." James said simply. "I'm gonna teach you about something called Paella."

\---

Vickers loved flying.

Tom had proven to be everything he'd hoped the griffin would be. The mythical creature carried Vickers into the sky as easily as Vickers would wear a backpack while out on a jog. Even with the saddle and all of the operative's weight Tom could fly fast, and maneuver tightly.

And now he was delivering Vickers' mission to him on a silver platter.

Several days earlier, and at the last town that he and his merchant friend had stopped at, Vickers had settled up with the rowdy older man. His employer had been somewhat reluctant to see him go. Vickers had already proven himself a great bodyguard, and had also made the both of them a large sum of unexpected money from his looted goods.

But the merchant had always known that Vickers' primary objective was getting to the capital. And it was no secret that the muscular agent had been champing at the bit to get in the air and get on his way ever since he'd gotten Tom to fly with him. So he'd seen it coming.

The two of them settled their affairs. Vickers had let the merchant have the last of the looted goods in exchange for ending their unwritten contract and a small sum of gold for the road. The merchant agreed,

wished him luck, and told him to contact him if he ever needed work again.

Then the two of them shook hands and Vickers had shouldered his bag and headed out.

And now as Vickers flew through the night air, the chill biting at his cheeks even under his scarf, he could see the night lights of the capital city.

Here I come. He thought as he took Tom into a dive.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tt7im7/wait_is_this_just_gate_116/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (114/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tqh733/wait_is_this_just_gate_113/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: Things occur. Training. Curious planetary differences. A hero's legend grows. And a heartfelt message.

Enjoy.

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"Ah, Fuck!" James yelled as another tree branch slapped him in the face.

The visor of his new helmet kept it from actually hurting him. But the helmet itself also meant that every time one of the branches hit him he ended up being inside a massive church bell while it was going off, even if only for a second or so at a time. Another branch pressed into his right side, pushing him over to the left.

"You've got to learn how to move with Steve as he rides!" Artair instructed from Xhalya's back, somewhere off to his left. "Steve's a big drake. Black drakes are about as big as they come. And Bristlenecks are even bigger. You're going to have to learn how to ride him through tight spaces without getting knocked on your ass. Or stuck." Artair continued, his voice seeming to switch its location every few seconds.

"I CAN'T MAKE THE TREES GET OUT OF OUR WAY!" James replied angrily.

"YOU can't!" Artair agreed. "Steve could if he wanted to. But that'd involve burning down the forest, or breaking down each tree! But if you're trying to escape an attack, or chase someone, or hunt an animal then that's not really an option!"

Suddenly James and Steve entered a small clearing. James was happy for the break in the beating he'd been taking. Then Artair appeared in front of them, sitting on Xhalya's back almost as if he was lounging. He simply

looked back at James with a smug grin. Then Xhalya reentered the forest and Artair rolled off of her left side as if falling.

"HEY!" James yelled, thinking that Artair might have been hurt. He may not have liked the guy, but he didn't want him to get trampled by a massive lizard, or break his spine by slamming into a tree.

Artair's head popped up on the far side of Xhalya.

"What?" He asked. Then he rose back up into the saddle. Another tree came up and the prince rolled to the side closer to James this time. James was about to watch how he did it when a tree slammed into his chest hard enough to knock him off the saddle.

James rolled awkwardly down Steve's back, and then off of the side of his tail as the drake kept running. He landed, rolling, on the ground just below the tree that had struck him, and Steve kept running for another twenty or so yards before realizing that something had gone wrong and turning back to find him.

James coughed and groaned as he tried to get his breath back. Everything had suddenly become quite sore from the impact. He heard the heavy footfalls of a drake approaching and knew from the direction that it had to be Xhalya. A pair of leather boots landed in front of him right as he rolled onto his back. Artair was looking down at him with a smug grin on his face.

"At least your armor is proving its worth." The prince said with a chuckle. Then, to James's surprise, he held out his hand.

James took it.

Steve came plodding back, looking rather nonplussed at the loss of his rider. James stood up with Artair's help, then leaned against the offending tree for a moment as he caught his breath.

"That..... sucked." He said between breaths. He stretched a bit and felt a knot deep within his back. "Oh.... That hurt." He admitted.

"You're luck that Steve helped break your fall a bit." Artair chimed in. "If that had been a straight fall, we'd probably be scooping you out of your helmet with a ladel."

"You might still end up doing that." James admitted. He stood up all the way and slowly walked over to Steve. The drake sniffed him for a moment, then licked the side of his helmet.

"Come on." Artair began. "Much as I love watching you get knocked on your ass, we've been away from the group long enough. Let's head back. We can try this again tomorrow."

"Yeah." James replied weakly. "Sounds good." He coughed again. "Sounds great."

"We'll take it slow on the ride back. But try switching from one side of Steve's saddle to the other while you're doing it." Artair instructed him. "We still have to go through the forest, so the trees and branches will still be good to use. You've just seen how important this will be. Now you just have to train."

"Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast." James said, though Artair didn't hear him.

"Just imagine if we'd done that in a city." Artair continued. "And instead of trees, you were dodging stone buildings. Those impacts could've been fatal."

"Yeah." James said as he mounted back up on Steve's saddle. "That would have been way more awesome." He said sarcastically under his breath.

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Only a week and a half after they'd taken off to return to the capital, the party returned to the Hamlet where the fire elemental had attacked. They'd passed several groups of Royal Guard marching in formation and Kela and Amina had asked them how things were ahead. Because of this they knew that the excavation of Elemental Glass Stone was almost complete. But James was still astounded to see just how little of it was left.

Where once there had been nearly fifty feet of the jagged black obsidian with its swirling reddish energy inside. Now there was only a small sliver left, maybe ten feet tall, and only about five wide at its base. It was so small that the soldiers had actually tied it up and pulled it out of the crater James had made.

More importantly to James, the villagers of the hamlet were rebuilding. Houses that had been destroyed were being replaced. The ones that had simply been damaged were either being repaired, or had had canvas tarps tied over them to keep the weather out until summer came around and they could be repaired properly.

The people of the hamlet didn't rush out to greet them like in the village after the battle with the grabber clan. It was too cold for that, and there was too much snow on the ground to let them all rush out. Plus, most of them were busy building and repairing their homes.

But when a group of children playing in the snow together saw them, they all ran off in different directions yelling, "They're back! The heroes are back!" To anyone and everyone who could hear them.

Amina hugged him tight from where she sat behind him on Steve's saddle.

"They're talking about you and Veliry." She said in his ear.

James still wasn't comfortable being known, or being popular. "Maybe I should have put my helmet on before we got here." He joked.

"Yes." Amina said as she gestured at the massive beast they were riding on. "I'm sure that would have done the trick."

"Eh. Fair point." He grumbled.

When they finally got to the center of the small town a small group was waiting for them, only five in total. Kela smiled when she saw that the angry dwarf whose cellar they had occupied was among them.

"Hello." Said the middle aged woman that stood at the center of the group. "We're so glad to see you again."

"Good day." Greeted Kela.

"The town looks a lot better." James added.

"Oh yes." Agreed the woman. "The soldiers and all the other visitors have given our little hamlet a lot of help, and a lot of business. It's been a great aid in these difficult times." She said.

"How is everyone?" James asked. "I know we didn't get here in time to help everyone. But how are you guys now."

"It's difficult." A younger, shorter, man chimed in. "A few families have decided to leave town. Some of them so they could start over, some because there's just too much pain here. But the rest of us are... Well. We're healing." The man said. The rest of the small group nodded, it was a somber moment. "Would've been worse if it weren't for you two though." The man said after a moment.

Then the dwarf spoke up, wringing his hands as he did. "Woulda been worse if you hadn't brought people to my cellar too." He said to Kela. "Sorry I was such an arse about it."

Kela just smiled. "It's alright. It was a scary time. There's no need to be ashamed of trying to protect you and yours." She said in reply.

There was a moment of awkward silence before the woman spoke up again.

"We don't have a lot." She said as she held up a basket. The contents were covered in a bundle of cloth. "But the town wanted to give you something for your help."

Kela was about to accept it when James stopped her.

"Keep it." He said simply.

The woman looked at him with shock. "But. We want to repay you." She said. "You were both hurt so badly trying to protect us."

James looked at Veliry whose hair was still much shorter than it had been, and had patches where the dragon scales had fallen off from the ointment the mages had given her. Whose skin still showed some burn damage in several places. She looked back at him and shrugged.

"Keep it." James reiterated as he turned back. "We didn't do that for money or gifts. We just did it because we didn't want anyone else to get hurt. If there's money in there, use it for repair costs. And if there's food, than share it with one of the families that's struggling." He felt Amina squeeze him a bit tighter as he spoke.

"Are you sure?" The dwarf asked.

Veliry spoke this time. "We're sure." She said. "Your village needs the supplies more than we do. If you want to pay us back, just get the hamlet rebuilt. Or make the day the Elemental was defeated a feast day or something."

"I think we can do that." Said another one of the people in the small group.

"Do you at least want to stay the night?" The woman asked. "The Bannered Dragon is open again." She added. One of the kids from earlier ran up and latched onto her leg as she spoke.

"That's okay." Kela said. "It's still early in the day. We need to keep riding. We're just glad to see that everyone is alright."

With that, the party began to ride again. The woman yelled out to them as they neared the edge of the far square.

"Thank you!"

James looked back with a smile and waved. The little kid stepped away from the woman, likely his mom and held his hands in front of him in a gesture that looked familiar to James.

"OX-E-JEN!" The small boy yelled.

James blushed as Amina chuckled into his back.

"How the hell does he know about that?" He asked under his breath.

"I think." Amina said. "That you might just be somebody's hero."

James turned back to look at her with a mocking scowl, but when he did she just kissed him on the cheek.

"I just hope that something that nerdy doesn't end up being my catchphrase." He said.

Artair groaned and rolled his eyes at the display.

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General Krick sat in the cushy chair of the jet as it flew from Maryland to Denver. He loved flying, despite the fact that he hated jet lag. The

Colonel sat across the aisle from him, tablet in hand as she reviewed the new site specs.

"Stupid inverted polar orientation." She said for about the twentieth time since the data had been figured out.

The secondary test had given them the data they needed, and it turned out that somewhere along the way from one universe to the other, North, South, East, and West switched. It explained why Vickers had ended up far south west of the capital when he'd transited from Maryland, which was north east compared to Fort Irwin.

It also meant that unless they wanted to send people into an arctic tundra, assuming the world on the other end had any, they would have to make their next Doorway somewhere up north in this world. That way they would emerge in the other world's southern areas.

So they'd consulted the maps and intel that Vickers and the other operatives besides Choi had sent home. They had a location picked that should, if their calculations were correct, put their entry point somewhere dead south of the capital and in the middle of a desert valley. The valley was also in the middle of one of the continent's larger mountain ranges.

It wasn't an ideal location. The sand would probably gunk up any equipment they sent over. They'd have to work hard right off the bat to get a water supply established. But the idea was that it was out of the way. It was a desert in the mountains after all, nobody should even be up there. There were no towns nearby, and no roads or mountain passes that came anywhere near it. If everything went to plan it would be the perfect place to set up a forward operating base.

Even if it meant listening to the Colonel complain about the cold wind in Colorado.

Krick wished he could light up one of his smokes while they were flying.

\---

"Alright ma'am. We're all set. Just look right into the camera, and when you see the red light say whatever you want to say to your son."

"Me too, right?" Joey asked from beside her.

"Of course." The young Sergeant said with a smile.

Margaret and her son sat in a room that looked a bit like a small library in the pentagon. The walls were a sort of vanilla white color and the floors were boring brown carpet. There were book shelves lining the wall. In front of them, on the opposite side of the room, was a large display screen, and a small camera sat on a tripod just above eye level on the other side of the table. The screen showed them what the camera saw.

She waited for the light to change. After a few moments the tech clicked a button on their screen and pointed a finger at them as the light switched from blue to red.

She paused a moment, trying to think of what to say, when Joey beat her to it.

"Hi James!" He said enthusiastically. "We're in Washington DC at the pentagon. The Military is letting us record a message for you because you're doing an Isekai!"

The tech looked at him curiously as he said the last word. Margaret placed her hand on Joey's hand, which had been tapping on the table. An old sign they'd worked on to let him know that he needed to slow down and relax for a moment.

"Sorry. They said we're not supposed to talk about that." Joey said as he looked at his mother's hand on his. "But I'm glad they're finally letting us talk to you. Mom had them let me listen to the message you sent. And I'm really glad that you're doing okay. I was worried about you a lot after the NTC thing."

"Joey." She interrupted.

"Sorry." He said as he looked back down. "Mom wants to talk too."

"It's okay Jojo." She said softly. "I'm excited to talk to him too. We'll get there."

"Okay." He said. He looked her in the eye for just a moment as he said it, which she knew meant he was taking it seriously.

She turned to the camera and smiled.

"Mijo." She began. "I was so happy to hear your voice. I've been worrying about you ever since I got your text message months ago. But your unit wouldn't tell me anything. Not even when I attended the service for your Sergeant Odikowe."

She fought not to let the tears run down her cheek. It was a hard battle when she was so happy to finally be able to talk to her boy.

"They won't give us specifics on where you are. Or what you're doing. And if Joey understood your message correctly." She placed an arm on her son's shoulder as she said this. "Than I know that they're probably doing that because of what it would mean."

She bit her lip a bit as she nodded her head.

"Thank you." She continued. "The General told me what you'd asked him to do with your pay. You didn't have to do that." She paused. "But thank you. I hope that soon you can come back and spend it yourself." Now came the part that she dreaded

"James. Wherever you are. Whatever you're doing. We're okay." She felt Joey slip his hand into hers. She looked at him as she squeezed it. "You take care of whatever you have to do over there. Then you do whatever you have to to get home. But YOU need to focus on what YOU are doing mijo."

She wiped a tear away.

"I don't know where you are. Or who these people around you are that the General said could keep you safe. But whatever happens, Joey and I love you. Your father loves you. We're proud of you. we're going to stay in DC for a while so they can keep us updated on what's going on with you. But don't worry about us okay." She chuckled. "Also, don't think this is going to exempt you from finishing college whenever you get back. Now Jojo has been wanting to talk to you forever. So here he goes."

She looked at Joey who looked at her for just a second then turned back to the camera and started rattling off questions and statements in the way that only he could. He was smiling while he spoke, and his energy and enthusiasm to talk to his big brother rubbed off on her. She couldn't help but smile as she watched him, even when she lost track of what he was saying.

"So if this is an Isekai, than it's clearly one of the ones where the main character doesn't have to die to get pulled into-"

She looked at the Sergeant near the computer. Then she saw the light flash off of one of the soldier's small black earrings. Something was off about it.

Is that.... a camera? She wondered. *Are they recording us? But they've already got the camera on the table.*

The Sergeant looked at her, and Margaret forced herself to smile. The Sergeant smiled back, then turned back to watch Joey keep talking.

No. That wouldn't make any sense.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tsbxdc/wait_is_this_just_gate_115/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (113/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tnw7vf/wait_is_this_just_gate_112/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yep. Drakes do that. Turns out that even in other worlds Mother Nature is a cruel mistress.

Anyways, enjoy.

\~

It was another week before Steve came sniffing his way to James and Amina's yurt.

James had been making almost daily trips to and from the nest location, startled at first by how quickly the two drakes had crafted their replacement den. He and Gixelle would often bring them food to keep them fat and happy. But the drakes never left the clearing around the den itself. Hunting wasn't as important to them now as defending their clutch was.

When Steve returned, (something Gixelle had assured him would happen without any help from either of them) it was nearly dawn. James and Amina both awoke to the chilling sensation of winter air being let into the yurt, and had been startled to see Steve's head forcing its way through the door flaps, his rapidly inflating and deflating neck being the only reason he couldn't get any further in. James had been quick to throw on his boots and show Steve to the yurt's drake-den attachment, what he'd come to think of as the "drake garage". Steve curled up into the pile of old, musty, furs that were piled up in the room and quickly began sleeping, then James returned to bed.

He didn't have to send word to the others. News of a massive, black bristleneck sniffing around town all through the night spread fast enough on its own. They all met for breakfast, though Kela did have to drag Veliry out of her studies. Even Artair showed up, despite none of them having seen him for the past months. Apparently his yurt was on the far side of The Den and he tended to keep to rowdier crowds while he was here. But they all knew what Steve's return meant.

It was time to go home. Steve couldn't stay near the clutch anymore. Gixelle would keep food going to Maxel and the eggs. But as long as he was in the area, Steve would be both threatened by AND simultaneously a threat to the newly hatched drakes. Drake fathers had a tendency to eat the weaker or sickly babies, and if food was scarce drake moms might kill the dads to provide for the babies. So Steve had to go, and he knew it too.

So they'd stay one more day to let the newly returned, and much slimmer, Steve relax for a day while they prepared their gear for the return trip. Then it would be time to leave.

The vacation was over.

\---

Margaret Choi placed her key card on the dresser in her hotel next to her purse.

She was torn. On the one hand she was incredibly happy that she'd gotten to hear from James. But she wasn't dumb enough to think that the General HADN'T been hiding things from her. Plus James's message had been almost too minimal. She knew her son, when he wanted to he could talk non-stop for hours, and he had a habit of speaking before he could think. But the

message he'd sent had only been a few words longer than a generic greeting card.

Which meant that he was hiding something too. The General had been honest about how they couldn't tell her everything just yet. He must have told James to keep the message short and sweet.

She understood all of that. Hell, she'd just spent the past few days having legal paperwork read to her by one of the most milquetoast people she'd ever met. He'd been a JAG officer, but apart from that he'd been so boring and forgettable that she'd honestly forgotten the man's name. It hadn't helped that he'd been monotonously reading about fifty pages of legal-ese that had effectively boiled down to, "None of this happened, and if you tell anyone it did you'll disappear".

She'd signed as quick as she could just so that the guy would shut up.

Only now she wanted to know what was going on more than ever.

But, first things first. Tomorrow she'd fly back home. Turn in the paperwork that the General's people had given her for her boss Jeff. He and the other staff would probably wonder why the government wanted a random Nurse to fly to DC. But the paperwork pretty much tied the poor guy's hands. That'd at least save her job for her.

Then she'd grab Joey, pack some bags, and fly back. They'd be staying in this hotel for the foreseeable future. But at least the General would be able to start opening up a bit more about what was going on with James.

She worried about what could be happening that would require the Army to send a young wheel mechanic with no combat experience and half a nursing degree to be their prime liaison with another country. That just didn't make sense.

She laid on the uncomfortable hotel bed and did everything in her power to fall asleep. She had a feeling that she'd need all the energy she could muster in the coming days. But her concern for her oldest son kept sleep at bay until almost three o'clock.

\----------

"Alright. Is the Chief ready on his end?" General Krick asked the techs in the control room of the A.P.G. facility.

One of the techs entered a command on their console as they said, "Hard to tell sir." and audio from Vicker's came through the room's speakers.

"WOOOOOO HOOOOOOO!!!!" The General heard the operative say through the recording.

It had been great news that Vickers' new pet was finally flying with him. But the man had become somewhat lax in his duties as a result, often choosing to fly the griffin instead of gathering actual usable intel for them. He couldn't blame the guy. But it was becoming an issue.

"He's been dropping the drones as he flies." The tech added. "So we've got good signal. But um.... well. He's distracted."

Colonel Muhammed piped in. "Chief Vickers. Get your ass on the ground and prep for the test." She said into the microphone on the tech's desk in front of her. Then she gestured for the tech to send the message.

It took almost ten minutes for the signal drones to relay the message to the chief. Then another ten to get his response back.

"Roger that ma'am." Vickers' voice said in response, the rushing of the wind didn't do much to hide the tone of exasperation from the man. "I'll be at the target location in five."

The General turned and looked at the Colonel with a face that said, "He's your problem."

Then he turned to a different tech. "How's the mobile unit?" He asked.

It took a moment for the tech to read the status on their screen. Then they replied. "They're successfully tapped into Camp Marion's power grid, and have their portable power stations at full charge. Deployment of the doorway generator will be finished before the chief arrives at his location."

"Does Camp Marion have their people ready?" He asked the tech.

"They're already on standby sir. If the portable units go out, they'll be ready to perform an emergency shutdown if their system gets too overloaded." The tech responded.

"Good. Only needs to hold out for a few minutes. Five tops." He said. The tech typed in the response.

The plan was simple enough. They knew how far the A.P.G. site was from the Fort Irwin site. They also knew how far both entry sites were from each other in Petravus. Granted, that distance was less precise since the maps weren't quite as accurate as Earth's GPS generated maps were. But they had an idea of the distance.

So they'd calculated a middle point between them that Vickers would be capable of getting signal from. This was made easier by the development of his griffin allowing him to fly now.

They'd ultimately settled on the relatively new Marine Corps training site in Colorado, Camp Marion. A massive artificial swamp that had been built around an abandoned town. It was basically the Corps' version of the Army's NTC. As such it was easy to make a nice empty spot for them to do the test.

All they were going to do was send a signal through. The drones Vickers had deployed on his side would record whether or not they had gotten the signal, then log it's strength. Vickers had been deploying them in a

massive, spread out, pattern for the past few days now using the griffin. Once the data was logged they'd be able to figure out where exactly the signal had come through. And if one of the drones recorded footage of the door opening on their side, than even better.

Then they'd compare the location with where the other two entrances to the world were.

After that they'd be able to calculate entry points much more accurately.

"Alright." Vickers' voice chimed in on the speakers. "I'm here. Drone sensor net is in place. I'm ready whenever you guys are."

"Copy that chief." The colonel said into the mic. She looked at the General.

He looked at the other techs for a moment.

"Signal the Camp Marion site. Tell em to do it." He said.

The techs in the room burst into action. Fingers tapping at keyboards and screens rapidly.

After a few minutes one spoke up.

"Mobile site is firing up sir." They paused. "Doorway generator is green." Another pause. "Doorway opened. Aaaaaaaand signal is being fired through."

The mobile site's generators lasted almost three minutes before one of them began throwing up warnings. A fail-safe shut it off before it could cause any real problems, then lead lined steel walls descended from its sides and shut it in. A bit of overkill in most situations, but they were designed to provide just enough protection to keep anyone nearby from being killed by a potential meltdown of the miniature reactors. Luckily the tech reported that the reactor was still stable, just shut down.

It took another fifteen minutes before Vickers responded.

"Got it." He said simply. "Let me check." There was a few minutes of silence. Then both Vickers and one of the techs who was monitoring the drone data as well both spoke at the same time.

"Huh. Weird." They both said at once.

"Not exactly where it was expected." Vickers continued. "But still within the search net's area. Your techs should have the data already. I'll start drone retrieval. Let me know if you need anything else. Vickers out."

"Where was it?" The Colonel asked.

"The computer is still aggregating the results." The tech replied. "Drones are just about drained from the extended use, some of them might

need a recharge before they can submit. But it's looking like it was just inside of the net radius. On the northern side. Estimates had put it more centralized to the drone net spread. But-"

"English please." The General interrupted. "Sum it up."

"Sorry sir." The tech replied. "It's a little outside what was expected. But it should still be usable. Just means a bit of extra number crunching before we have an exact formula for entry points."

"Do we need another test?" The general asked. "If so, the mobile unit should be able to reset in a day or so. We can have em shift a few miles and rinse and repeat."

"We don't NEED one, per se." A separate tech replied. "But it wouldn't hurt."

The General considered this for a moment before responding. "Have Vickers leave the drones in place. In fact if he has any left, which he should, have him deploy them around the area that the test signal came through. We'll have the mobile unit move a bit south, see if that puts it more inside of our net. Then we'll try again."

"Yes sir." The two techs replied simultaneously.

"Good job everyone." He said as he began walking towards the door, already fishing out a smoke. "That's good intel. It'll be better after the next test."

As he passed the Colonel he paused for a second.

"Might wanna have a word or two with the chief." He said. "Get his head out of the clouds, literally and figuratively."

She simply nodded in response. She'd been thinking the same.

Then he walked out into the hall, lighter already sparking.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (112/?)

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Writer's note: WooHoo! This is, effectively, another story arc done. Next chapter is basically gonna be a wrap up/catch up with the other players in the game. Then we'll get to the trip back to the capital and more maneuvering by various parties. Don't worry, the appearance of the baby drakes will be revealed eventually. But James and Steve won't be present at the hatching for.... Reasons.

Anyways Enjoy.

Also,
[*THIS*](https://i.insider.com/577d1fd54321f122008b63a0?width=750&format=jpeg&auto=webp) *will be a very important visual for you to have as you read. Also for reasons.*

\~

James ignored the ache in his shoulder and the space at the base of his spine as he drove the sled on towards Steve and Maxel's den.

"Can't this thing go any faster?" Gixelle yelled from her spot in the back of the sled. She writhed in pain and discomfort in her seat, her muscles spasming randomly from the pain that Maxel was sending her through their bond.

"You know that better than I do!" James yelled back. He had to admit, stabbing pain or not, he was getting the better end of this deal.

Apparently, once the pain had begun, Gixelle had searched for him for close to an hour before finding him. After getting him to down the pain killer she'd given him, and dousing his tattoo in an elixir that would temporarily dull the connection, they'd gone to one of the main gates and grabbed one of the transports set aside specifically for riders whose mounts were giving birth.

The sled was only big enough for a driver, a rider, and a space for some basic supplies in case the delivery took longer than expected. Due to the weather those supplies included a heavy duty tent and a bunch of blankets, but also some fire wood and dried foods. James really hoped they wouldn't need that, but he had a feeling they would.

The beast pulling the sled was some kind of massive, six legged boar creature with dark brown stripes down its side. It had blinders over its eyes and the bit in its mouth also had a strap that covered its nose with spices and herbs that had strong smells. All of that was so that the beast wouldn't see or smell what it was headed to. If it did, it would stop pulling the sled long before they got to the den. The creature was also meant to be a sacrifice to the drakes if they ignored their senses in favor of defensiveness or hunger, real threats while the mother was birthing her clutch.

"Just drive faster." Gixelle groaned back. James looked back and saw that she looked like she was going to vomit. "Fucking Max. Why do you always have to clutch so fucking hard?" She said as she leaned over the side.

"Take more of the pain killer." James said, as he felt the daggers in his shoulder shift a little bit, making him lean to that side unconsciously.

"We only have so many of those." She replied. "This could last the rest of today."

"Right." He responded. "Probably wanna space those out."

Gixelle just groaned in response.

At least the sled was making good time.

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James didn't completely know what to expect when they got there. The potion she'd given him had worn off about ten minutes before they arrived, and his shoulder and lower back were killing him. But looking back and seeing Gixelle curled up into a ball and shaking had made him pretend that it wasn't hurting too bad. When she asked, he lied and told her that Maxel must've let go for a minute.

The sled couldn't get through the trees around the den's clearing, so James hopped off, tied it up, then told Gixelle to take one of the elixirs and head in. He could bring the supplies by himself and set them up. She'd hesitated, debating whether to take the drink now or save it for later, and also probably debating letting James do the work by himself. Then a bout of Maxel's pain hit her and she quickly uncorked one of the bottles and downed it.

James busied himself with the supply bundle in the back of the sled while she walked towards the woods. The second she got a few yards in he dropped to his knees.

"FFFFFFUuuuuuu^(uuuuccccckkkk!!!") He groaned as he arched his back. He instinctively grabbed a handful of snow, lifted his shirt, and pressed it to the spot on his tail bone where Maxel was biting Steve. He knew it wouldn't work. But the primitive part of his brain told him to just do something, anything at all to stop the pain.

After a moment he simply lifted his shirt up a bit more and then plopped down into the snow so that it was covering the spot. He grabbed another handful of the white powder, packed it into a ball and then tucked it into his collar and onto his shoulder.

All it did was give him a combination of stabbing pain, and freezing cold. He simply hoped that the cold sensation transmitted to Steve and helped ease the poor drake's pain a bit.

When he finally made it to the clearing, bundle of supplies on his back, Gixelle was sitting on top of the awning they'd installed over the den's entrance. She'd pulled its stakes out and collapsed it into its base components, and was sitting on the folded up canvas breathing heavily. The metal pipe that had been used as the den's air flow chimney was laying on the ground nearby.

"What'd you do that for?" He asked, breathing heavily from both exertion and pain.

"You'll see." Was her only reply.

James approached the entrance to the den slowly after he dropped the supplies next to her.

"Careful." She said. "Fire."

As if on cue, James felt the air warm up immensely, and then a spout of bright yellow fire emerged from where the metal tube had been. The pain in his lower back eased for a moment. He looked at the den entrance and approached warily. Then the pain returned. He'd felt that ebb and flow of pain several times before.

What he saw inside was both disgusting, and explained a lot, and made him want to gag.

He had seen footage of lizards and snakes and other reptiles laying eggs before. Hell, his eighth grade science teacher had a couple bearded dragons in the class room and they had a watch posted for when the female laid her eggs during one of the semesters.

He had never seen anything like what was occurring between Steve and Maxel inside the den.

Steve was locked in a statue like pose in front of Maxel. The carcass of some creature, likely intended to be their dinner when he returned, was still lodged in his teeth as his head reared back in pain. Maxel had the base of Steve's tail locked in her jaw, the long, dark, snake-like teeth in her mouth sunk well into the meat of the tail entirely. Her front left claw was latched onto Steve's shoulder, holding him in place with brutal efficiency. Steve's eyes were narrowed as he focused on simply holding still, trying to prevent Maxel's teeth or claws from doing any more damage. But James saw both of the drakes turn their eyes towards him.

The thing that drew his attention most, was the eggs.

He was surprised to even see any of them in the first place, since he kind of assumed that that would mean Maxel was almost done. But as he looked, he realized that the eggs weren't being laid individually, but rather as a long, entangled cluster. They looked like a long, drawn out, cluster of very white grapes. Only the grapes were almost two feet wide, and instead of little tree branch-like stems, they had a gooey pinkish membrane attaching them.

It took a moment. But eventually his brain made that mental connection.

It's like the world's biggest. Longest. Nastiest. Nerd rope. He thought.

The mental image made him gag, and he had to retreat so he could throw up off to the side of the den entrance.

Gixelle, despite her discomfort, laughed at him.

"Pretty gross huh?" She asked, as he used a bit of snow to wipe the vomit off of his face.

"Oh god. " He said before gagging a little more, his pain a distant afterthought at the moment. "Why do they come out like that?"

"How should I know?" She asked, before clutching at her stomach and doubling over a bit more.

"How much more does she have in her?" He asked.

"How long did it look when you peaked in just now?" She countered.

"I don't know." He admitted. "Maybe ten feet. Let me recheck." He said as he stood up and turned back to the entrance.

"Don't throw up this time." She said.

James peeked back in and tried to do some mental calculations. The rope of eggs, he shuddered as he realized that the tendril connecting them was pulsing a little bit, was actually probably closer to fifteen feet. He was still looking at it when he felt the pain in his back lessen. He looked over and saw Maxel rearing her head back.

He dove out of the way just in time to avoid a gout of her fire breath as it blasted out of the den's entrance.

"Closer to fifteen feet." He said as he lifted his head up.

Gixelle just nodded weakly.

"We're gonna be here at least a few more hours before THAT part is done." She said as she rolled over on her side and curled up. "Fuckin Maxel. Horny bitch." She said under her breath.

James crawled over to the supply bundle and began unpacking the tent. They might not be able to get truly comfortable in the current situation. But they could at least hold back the cold a bit.

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Maxel did not finish laying her rope of eggs until nearly dawn of the next day. When James felt the pain in his back stop, he had simply assumed that there would be another jet of flame from the den, as there had been every thirty or forty minutes since Maxel had started. However, when his shoulder stopped hurting, and he saw the gout of black edged flames emerge, he knew that something was different. Gixelle, who had downed two bottles at once so she could attempt to sleep, though she'd constantly tossed and turned, suddenly woke up and sat upright almost immediately. After a few moments her face went from one of constant discomfort and strain, to one of relaxation and relief.

"I think they're done." She said after a moment.

James didn't need to be told that. Steve's head was sticking out of the den's entrance looking at them both.

James had the sense that Steve was considering what to do with them, and hoped that he chose to ignore them. Luckily enough, after a moment Steve's head retreated back inside.

James got up, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"Don't." Gixelle said as she reached for his arm to stop him.

James slipped her grip. He had to see. Even if it was a bad idea. He grabbed the bag that they'd brought for the drakes.

When he got to the entrance and peered around the edge of the hole, both Maxel and Steve were staring at him with rapt intensity.

Underneath both of them was the rope of eggs. It coiled around in a spiral pattern that reminded James of the sausages and chorizo he'd seen at the carnicerias back home whenever he'd gone grocery shopping with his mom or his aunts and uncles. It doubled over itself in several places. He estimated that it had to be close to fifty feet long in total, though it was hard to tell with the drakes covering most parts of it.

Maxel began to rear her head back, wisps of smoke emerging from the sides of her mouth. Luckily Steve seemed to be back in control of himself and quickly snapped at the air in front of her, causing her to back off and stop prepping for an attack.

"Woah mama." James said, as he dropped the bag next to himself. "I'm not here to do nothin' bad to the babies. Just figured you'd want some snacks." He said as he reached into the bag.

He rummaged around a bit before pulling out a couple of chicken carcasses and throwing them on the ground in front of the massive, exhausted, mama drake. She hissed for a minute as they flew towards her. Then she greedily snatched one up once she realized what they were. She swallowed it whole, not even chewing it like she normally did.

"See." He said. "We're cool. We're friends." He tossed a leg of goat to Steve who sniffed it then began chewing on it like a dog with a bone. "Thank god you're smart enough to keep her from roasting me bud."

He offloaded the last few bits of meat for them, then quietly retreated back to the tent.

"You're lucky." Gixelle said as he returned. "Normally Maxel kills anyone who comes close to her after clutching. Or tries anyways."

"Yeah. Steve stopped her though." He said.

"Really? Interesting." She replied. "Smart drake."

"Yeah I've noticed that since getting him. Way smarter than I ever expected." James said as he sat on his bedroll.

"Good counter to his dumb, seemingly suicidal, rider." She said as she lightly punched his shoulder. "Get some rest. I'll take first watch."

"You sure?" He asked. "You got the raw end of the deal with this whole thing."

"I'll be fine." She assured him. "Now that the pain's over I'm doin' just fine."

"Alright then." James said. "Wake me if anything crazy happens."

"That'll only take a few hours." She said with a grin.

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Sure enough only a few hours later, three according to James's phone, the drakes began moving enough to wake James up. He sat upright next to where Gixelle was peaking out of the tent door.

"What's going on?" He asked groggily.

"They're covering things." She said simply. "It's why I pulled the awning and pipe down. Take a look." She said as she held the tent flap open a bit wider and scooted over.

James moved up and looked out. After a few seconds he was about to go out and stop the drakes. How? He didn't know. But he had to try.

At least until Gixelle's hand clamped down on his arm and pulled him back down onto his ass.

"Don't." She said. "This is what they do."

"But they're destroying the den." He said, a note of anxiousness in his voice. "They'll destroy the eggs."

"Some." She agreed. "But not all of them."

The air grew hot for a moment as one of the drakes, Steve as it turned out, breathed fire directly onto the center of the mound of dirt that was forming over the egg clutch.

"What's he doing?" James asked eagerly.

"Ssssh. Be quiet." She urged him. "We're only here because we've helped them. Don't risk their anger. They're burying the eggs and baking them into the mud." She said. "It keeps other predators, not that there are many around here, from smelling them. Makes them harder to break. AND it helps those two keep them warm."

"How are they gonna keep them warm without the den?" He asked.

"They're going to build another one on top of it." She said simply. "They'll bring in some of the dirt, snow, and all the other stuff around

here in, and build an even bigger den right on top of where the eggs are. Then they'll sit their massive drake asses right on top of them, and breath fire any time they think things are getting too cold."

"How long is that gonna last?" He asked.

"For you? 'Bout a week. Maybe two. Maxel will get slim again, and Steve will lose some of that muscle he's built up. But we'll bring em some food every now and then. They'll be fine." She closed the tent flap and then gestured back at the bed rolls. "Go back to sleep. We'll leave whenever you wake up."

James did what he was told. But with the drakes stomping around, and digging, and randomly spewing fire, it was a while before he actually managed it.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (111/?)

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Writer's note: This is the part where the DM goes, "Alright, your current situation requires at least \[insert random amount of time here\] of down time for \[insert event of choice\] to occur successfully. What are you guys doing while you wait?" and then there's a time skip and the characters potentially gain a few skills or something.

Enjoy.

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James, Amina, Kela, and Veliry spent another three weeks in The Den.

To James, it was probably the best time he'd had since being summoned to this world.

He and Amina fixed up the yurt to their liking. They added a few dressers and chests for their gear, plus a rack for each of their armor and weapon load outs. James's new Drake Scale Armor, dark purplish black scale reinforced metal with black wolf fur around the neck of the leather under layer, looked great. Especially with his mage's blade and chain hanging next to it. The set contrasted greatly with the bright red, steel, and brass look of Amina's armor.

They got an iron flat top made for their fire place, and as soon as they did James ran to the markets to get pots, bowls and plates, silverware, and ingredients. He treated her to a family recipe; rice with strips of steak, mushrooms, something that looked and tasted like a cucumber despite its blue coloration, carrots, spinach, and a fried egg. He didn't

have kimchi or soy sauce to finish the dish, but he got it close enough. The next day she treated him to a stew of some kind of slow simmered meat that tasted like pork, but had the texture and appearance of tofu. It was then stuffed into balls of dough, with mushrooms and cheese, and left to bake until the outside was golden brown. Then she put them in bowls and poured the sauce from the stew over the top of it. It was delicious.

They'd spend their days wandering around the city, or training in one of the numerous fighting rings. One day James got swept up into an impromptu fighting competition, apparently a common thing for the members of the Clan. No magic, no ranged weapons, and blunted melee weapons only. Scoring referees would mark hits, and if a hit would be fatal in normal circumstances then the person who delivered it would win instantly. James managed fifth place, which was about fifteen places higher than he'd expected. Amina got second, losing only because Gixelle had joined too. Kela watched from the sidelines with a smug smirk.

For the first time since meeting her, James saw Gixelle in a setting where she wasn't constantly aloof. Several times he went to see her in her yurt, a massive five chambered version with weapons, armor, and gifts galore, and saw instead a leader. He saw her meeting with leaders of the various sub-factions of Clan Drakrid, with mayors of cities, with lords and ladies of the land, and even with foreign diplomats. During these meetings he didn't see the casual, laid back, traveling adventurer, but instead saw a calm, collected, and occasionally stern governmental leader. He imagined that if she'd had a pant suit on she would have made a startlingly efficient member of congress or something back home. But her face always lit with a smile whenever she saw James and Amina, softening and seeming to relax from the rigid, statuesque features it had been sporting only moments earlier as she dealt with someone she needed to be firm with.

It was an interesting thing to witness, and he kept it in mind to do what he could to never make her wear that mask with him.

He worked on his magic, though only rarely with any help from Veliry (who they only saw maybe once a week if they were lucky). He eventually managed to get lightning to work, casting vicious, bright green, bolts of electric destruction that had accidentally set his yurt on fire the first time he'd cast it. He found a book in one of the shops in town that taught him the basics of healing magic, something he'd wanted to learn for a while now, and he began reading it every night, sometimes reading to Amina when she wanted to fall asleep. He couldn't really practice the healing magic without having someone to heal. But the knowledge would be useful if he ever ended up in a situation where he did need it. He decided that he'd check in with the local healers tent and see if they'd let him practice on some of the less fatally injured people some time.

Amina and Kela would occasionally visit the local garrison, only a few miles away from the city, and keeping the soldiers in line and in shape. James usually used these times to check in on Steve and Maxel. The yellow drake was huge now, her belly looking bigger every time James saw her. Steve on the other hand had gained weight, and almost all of it muscle. He seemed to have grown nearly five feet in height, and his arms, legs,

and back seemed to flex with every single breath. James knew that it had only happened because he was both providing for, and protecting, Maxel all by himself. But still, the transformation was impressive. Sometimes Gixelle would accompany him for the trips. But more often than not her duties kept her too busy. When they did she usually sent him with instructions or suggestions of what to do.

Only a week after he'd sent his message home to his family, he received one back. It was obvious from the message that they hadn't let his mother know EVERYTHING. But they'd given her the basics. He was on a top secret mission far away. He was learning new and wonderful things. He was in a dangerous place, but he was also surrounded by allies who were capable of handling things if it came to it. It had been good to hear her voice. She was glad he was okay. His brother was doing well, and had even managed a 3.5 GPA this semester. Things were under control back home. She chastised him for having all of his pay sent home. But he could also hear the relief of it in her voice as well. She congratulated him on his promotion, even though she didn't understand how it had worked. She wished him luck, wished him a safe journey home, and told him to remember that they all loved him.

It snowed more, and only a week after Amina's arrival, it had become cold enough that the snow ended up sticking. The city, the area in general really, was beautiful when covered in the soft white of the snow. He taught Amina about making snow men. She showed him how to make snow boars, and Kela showed him how to make snow wolves. Her claws made her startlingly good at carving the packed snow, and by the time she was done he and Amina were simply standing back and watching. Her snow wolf was an almost flawless recreation of Jurl, though she insisted that it was just a generic werewolf.

He and Amina grew closer. They continued to teach each other their native languages. James was almost fluent in the language of Petravus and could have conversations even without his medallion. He'd still get hung up every now and then and have to pull it out of one of his bottomless bags, but he could talk. They learned more about each other too. He learned that Amina was allergic to something called a smoo berry, and resolved to learn what those were so he could avoid them. She learned about how his mom had made him continue learning Korean even after his father had died so that he could stay in touch with the parts of his family that couldn't speak English or Spanish.

They made love in the yurt as often as possible. Sometimes not leaving the small hut for entire days, and only stopping when they needed to rest, or go get water and food. They learned what each other's turn-ons and turn-offs were. Amina liked it when he ran his fingers up her back, and hated anything to do with feet, his or hers. James was startlingly ticklish, to the point that it could derail their sexual encounters entirely.

They luxuriated in each other's company. And as the days went on, James realized that he really was in love with this amazing woman, and wondered what he'd done to get so lucky. The impending marriage, whenever it was

set to happen, began to seem less and less like an ominous event on the horizon.

In short, his time in The Den felt like a vacation, a visit home, a training holiday, and a mini honeymoon (even if they weren't married yet).

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When the day finally came. The day that Maxel finally birthed her clutch of eggs. James had been in the middle of eating with Amina and Kela in the dining hall. They were laughing at a story that a nearby orc had just told involving his drake and a swamp drake that had resulted in the orc spending nearly two days stuck hip deep in muck while his drake got carnal with the swamp monster. James got just a moments warning, seeing Gixelle come in through one of the door flaps across from him.

He had just begun thinking, *Wow, she looks like shit. Wonder if she drank too much yesterday.* When his world exploded in pain.

It was difficult to explain the first pain that his bond with Steve transferred to him. It was positioned right at the top of his ass crack. He had a vague sense, from past experience with a few dogs and cats (and one cousin) that he was being bitten. But it was so much deeper inside of him, and in a position on his back that he doubted even Amina could access if she'd wanted to bite him there. Then he realized why.

He jumped up from his seat at the table, yelling. "OH FUCK!" Just as he had the realization that Maxel, must have been biting Steve's tail.

His sudden outburst drew laughter from the other clan members around him. He had a moment to loathe the fact that his pain was amusing them. He thought he heard one of them say, "Looks like someone's welcoming some pups today."

Then he felt four daggers sink into his shoulder. Three of them bit deep into the top of his shoulder, near the collar bone. The last of them stabbed into the center of his shoulder blade. He slammed back to the table, knocking his bowl and a jug of water over in the process, the pain driving him back down as if he could somehow get off of the blades that had just stabbed him.

Amina had already jumped to her feet to see what was wrong, Kela was standing on her side of the table asking what happened. Then a hand that felt like a vice grip grabbed him by the back of the neck and lifted him up off his feet and slammed him onto his back on the table, scattering the food and drinks that had been there.

It was Gixelle, with a crazy look in her eyes. Amina was trying to pull her back, to no avail, when the large woman pulled a vial out of one of the pouches on her belt, pulled the cork out with her teeth and then forced the open end into his mouth.

"DRINK!" She yelled. The look in her eyes told James not to try to resist.

He swallowed the mouthful of bitter, slightly lime flavored concoction. Then she lifted him off the table, lifted his pant leg up, tearing it a little in the process, and poured something on the back of his calf, right where his Clan Drakrid tattoo was. Then she let go of him and leaned over the table. She gripped it hard enough to cause a portion of it to splinter under her left hand.

Over the next minute or so, the pain in his shoulder and in his phantom tail/tail bone seemed to dull. It still hurt, but the pain went from a sharp stabbing bite, to a loud ache, as though he had really bad bruises.

"Oh god." He moaned as he rolled off the table to the side. His hand landed in what had once been some roasted potatoes. Then he lifted himself up, ignoring the pain, and rested his arms on the top of the table. "It's happening isn't it?"

She looked at him, veins popping on her neck. Her response was simple.

"No shit."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (110/?)

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Writer's note: Watching y'all freak out over James being blatantly incorrect about dinosaurs was kinda funny, not gonna lie.

Anyways, here's some stuff.

Enjoy.

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"Right this way ma'am." Said the young soldier, a lieutenant, as Margaret DeLaRosa stepped out of the green van and into the warm DC air. The young woman gestured toward a pair of large doors in the side of the building, a plain tan and brown building that seemed designed to be forgettable, and then walked forward to open them. Margaret followed.

"Is my son in here?" She asked the lieutenant.

"That's not for me to say ma'am I'm just the escort." The lieutenant answered. She wasn't rude about it, just answering a question. The tone as non-committal as if Margaret had asked her what the weather was in a different city.

The two of them walked down several hallways, then a flight of stairs heading down, and then one more hallway, stopping in front of a plain grey metal door with a plaque next to it that read, "Classroom B".

The lieutenant knocked twice then spoke. "Mrs. DeLaRosa sir."

"Come on in." Replied a woman's voice from inside.

The lieutenant pulled the door open and then gestured for Margaret to enter, but stayed outside and shut the door once she had.

Once inside Margaret saw that it was indeed a classroom. There were whiteboards at the far end, a desk with a computer off to the side of them, and tables with chairs arrayed out across the room.

Sitting on the edge of one of the tables near the front was a salt and pepper haired man smoking a cigarette, which he snuffed out as the door opened. Standing next to him and closer to the white board was a middle aged woman with dark brown skin and her hair done up in a bun. Both of them were wearing simple army uniforms and she saw the Bird and Stars of a Colonel and a General. Though she wasn't familiar enough with the higher ranks to know what kind of General.

The man stood up as soon as the door closed and the cigarette had been put out, and began walking towards her, hand extended.

"Mrs. DeLaRosa." He said. There was a smile on his face that Margaret thought was actually genuine as he took her hand and shook it gently. "I'm Major General Krick." He said before pointing at the Colonel behind him. "This is Colonel Muhammed. I'm sure you have a lot of questions for us."

"Where's my son?" She asked immediately. "What's going on? Why am I here meeting with a General, and not his unit commander, who has denied my calls for months now?" Her voice had raised significantly as she asked the questions, to the point where she was almost yelling.

"Woah. Woah woah woah." Said the General, his hands raised in a placating gesture.

"Where is my son?" She repeated. "Where's James?" She asked, finger pointed at the General's chest.

"He's okay." General Krick replied. The answer, despite its simplicity, shocked her. "He's fine. Alive and healthy. And he's doing just fine." He said it in a soft, gentle voice, and when she looked at his face she didn't see a lie. "In fact I just spoke to him.... kind of, two days ago."

"Where is he?" She asked, her voice raising again.

He gestured at a chair behind the desk she was next to.

"Please." He said. "Sit down. We'll tell you as much as we can." Then the General pulled one of the chairs from the desk in the row ahead of her and turned it around so he could sit in it. When she looked at the Colonel the woman remained standing, hands clasped in front of her.

The Colonel gave a small smile and nodded at her when they looked at each other.

She hesitated, looking back and forth between the two of them for just a moment, then sat down, placing her purse on her lap as she did.

"Mrs. DeLaRosa. Before we go any further, I wanna reiterate that James is doing just fine. His situation is a little complicated right now. But your son is okay." He said as pulled out a tablet and sat down.

"I'm glad to hear that." She replied. "But where is he? I got a weird text message about some... anime thing that his little brother got excited about, and a warning that he was still alive. And then nothing... FOR MONTHS. What is going on?"

"We'll get there." The General said. "But first. We had James record a message to send back to you and his brother." He pulled the tablet's built in stand around and stood it up so it was facing her. "For.... well, a lot of reasons really, it's audio only. But I figured you'd want to hear from him before we got started."

The General gestured for her to hit the big play button on the screen. She looked at him curiously for a moment. Then reached out and tapped it with her finger.

For the first time in over half a year, she heard her son's voice. She fought not to let herself cry.

"Hey mom. Hey Joey." It began. "I want you guys to know that I'm doing alright. Things are... a bit confusing right now....."

She listened to the rest of the message. By the time it was done, she was crying, but mostly from happiness at the fact that her son was all right.

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James hit the button on the face of his phone, ending the recording. He smiled, even as a tear formed in the corner of his eye. Amina rubbed his shoulder a bit with her hand, which had been resting there while he recorded the message. He wiped the tear away.

"I hope the General let's mom send one back." He said, after a moment. "It'll be nice to hear from her. Joey too, if they let him."

"I'm sure they will." Amina said. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah." He replied with a small grin. "Yeah I'm.... I'm good. Let's go see how Veliry's doing. I haven't seen or heard anything from her in days."

"She's probably hip deep in research notes with all the other mages." Amina replied. James fiddled with the phone and tablet for a moment and then stood up to join her. "I'm glad they're being understanding." She added.

"Me too." He said as he hugged her. Then they threw on their jackets and stepped out of the yurt.

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Amina was almost literally correct about Veliry's whereabouts.

The diminutive mage stood at a table that was practically overflowing with scrolls, books, and loose sheets of parchment notes and theories.

The most surprising thing about it wasn't the level of mess that she was currently delving into to read new theories and ideas. It was the fact that her bandages were completely gone, and her head had hair again. It wasn't the scraggly mess that it had been before. It was short, mostly just a thick reddish fuzz covering her head. But it was definitely back.

She also seemed to have two small ridges of dark green scales growing from her forehead, up over the top of her head, and then down the back of her head until they almost reached the collar of her robes. The front scales formed a series of short spikes angled backwards.

Veliry, to her credit, didn't pay the scales any attention. Although, James thought, she also wasn't paying him or Amina any attention either. She was so wrapped up in her reading.

"Uh. Vel?" He asked.

"Hmm?" She said, still not breaking from her studies.

"You uh.... You okay?" He asked. "We haven't seen or heard from you in almost a week now. Everything all right? Anything..... interesting, to tell us?"

She flipped the scroll she was reading over, then began scanning the back. "Yeah. Lots of stuff. Did you know that dragons can fly even while they're asleep?" She asked without turning to look at them.

James shook his head despite the fact that she couldn't see it. A dwarven researcher bustled past him, muttering about something.

"I did not. That's uh..... pretty cool I guess." He said. "I see that you've got your hair back.... along with some... other stuff."

"Yep." She said, though she did scratch the scalp next to the scale ridge on the right side of her head.

"Looks good. So uh. What's up with the scales?" He asked.

"Side effect." She said quickly. She dropped the scroll and turned to read from a book that was open on her left. Her finger stayed pointed at the point she'd left on the scroll, saving her spot.

"Of?" He asked.

Veliry sighed. Then she turned around to look at him. Amina was busy inspecting a massive tooth that was floating in a jar.

"The researchers here developed a cream that helps with burns. It uses dragon saliva and wyvern stinger extract, though not the toxin they excrete, and the same healing magic that we use in our bandages. It accelerates healing from burns AND hair growth." She pointed at her head. "But it also sometimes causes scale manifestation." She waved her hands at the other researchers. "Look around. plenty of people have them." She said.

James did and, sure enough, she was right. The dwarf that had passed by a moment earlier had some blue scales growing on the side of his arm. An elf woman over near a glass case that had some kind of green gas in it had some some scales similar to Veliry's growing on her cheek. An old, grey haired man writing in a notebook had almost his entire writing hand covered in dark black scales. Even his nails looked like they would be at home on a drakes claws.

"Don't worry." Veliry said, seeing the look of concern on his face. "I only have to apply the solution for a couple more days. A week or so later the scales will start to flake off, then eventually they'll be gone. Might have some odd bald patches. But it doesn't matter."

"You sure?" He asked.

She turned and called to the elf woman near the green gas. "Hey Silanor!" She half yelled. "Mind showing them some of the flaking?"

The woman looked at them with surprise, then smiled and nodded. She reached up to her cheek and felt around the scales for a moment, then found one that was loose and gave it a light tug. It popped off easily, and revealed smooth pink skin underneath. James cringed.

"See?" Veliry asked. "Her cheek's good as new underneath."

"Okay. Well that's gross." He said. "Look. I'm gonna leave before I see anything else traumatizing. You need anything?" He asked.

Veliry was already back to reading and cross referencing. But she looked up long enough to answer.

"No. I'm good. Thank you. The research station has everything I need." She said.

"Okay. Well. Let us know if you do end up needing anything. And um.... maybe get outside every now and then. It's been snowing. Kinda nice." He said before leading Amina out.

"Snow?" She said curiously. Then she exclaimed. "Snow! Guys we can test the-"

But by then James and Amina were already out of the front door of the building.

"An odd lot." Amina said as they walked out, arm in arm.

"Not the words I'd use." He admitted. "But yeah. Little bit."

"Mages and scholars are like that." She said. "Especially the ones obsessed with dragon kind."

"Is Veliry obsessed with dragon kind?" He asked. "Cause she seemed like she was."

"Vel? No no no." Amina assured him "Veliry is worse. She's obsessed with ALL knowledge. And it's been at least a year or so since the researchers here have sent a report to the capital, so almost all of that stuff in there was new knowledge for her."

"So, kid in a candy shop huh?" He wondered.

"Precisely." She agreed.

"Hopefully we can actually get her out of there once Steve and Maxel are done with the babies." He said. "Now. I'm guessing that you hunting me down to scold me for almost dying was the first thing you did once you got here." He said.

She nodded. "It was kind of a priority." She agreed.

"Well then, you haven't been to the market street yet. Have you?" He asked.

"Not yet." She admitted.

"Well I've recently come into a lot of money." He said. It still hurt a little to think about. But there wasn't exactly anything he could do about it, so he figured he might as well embrace it. "What do you say I treat you to a bit of shopping. We can get you a new sword to go with your fancy new shield. Kela bought herself a new axe."

Amina smiled. "Actually I've always kind of wanted some Drake Scale Armor." She said happily.

"Well then." He said with a grin. "You're gonna be jealous of what I had commissioned right before you found us the other day."

The two of them kept walking.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (109/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tjl1b1/wait_is_this_just_gate_108/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: This is your reminder that Steve exists. In all his glory.

Enjoy

PS: This is James's [*face*](https://tse4.mm.bing.net/th/id/OIP.elx0GjAlSsDA5B-BLtcQHQHaHL?pid=ImgDet&rs=1) *at several points towards the end of this.*

PPS: Yes, James is wrong about the time of dinosaurs. He's a mechanic and a nursing student. Not a paleontologist. I googled stuff as I was writing. Prime example of Cunningham's Law in these comments.

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For one of the first times in his life, James was glad he had Army issue combat boots to wear. Normally he hated the things. They were way taller than he liked his shoes, they had to be tied tight to avoid blisters, he had to wear long socks under them, and they got hot and stinky after a while.

But they were damn good at keep mud out.

As he walked with Gixelle through the cold soggy mud that the melting snow had created he thanked CIF for the boots. Now he only wished he had his shooting headphones so he could block out her complaining.

"Damn feet are cold." She said, for probably the hundredth time since they'd started walking.

James just kept trudging along.

When he and Amina had met up with Kela for breakfast at the dining hall Gixelle had found them and told James that they should gather some supplies to run out to their drakes. James had said that that would be fine and that if she wanted she could give him a list of stuff to gather and they could meet in an hour or so.

Now they were hiking the miles of frost covered mud and grass to where Steve and Maxel had chosen their birthing den. It was like walking on a cold crème brûlée. He'd walk a few yards, then the frosty mud would crack and he'd sink in almost ankle deep. He'd step past the sunken foot, then lift it out causing a wet sucking noise for a moment. Then he'd get another yard or two and it would happen again.

Even with the boots keeping his feet dry, and somewhat warm, it was miserable.

The jacket he'd gotten all those months ago, when he'd woken up and found out that he was going to be taming a drake unexpectedly, was a good jacket. But it wasn't good enough for this. Wearing his army issue waffle top underneath wasn't going to be storming the runways of Paris any time soon. But at least he was warm. His ears were a different story.

"I thought you said the drakes would be fine in the winter." He shouted back at Gixelle, who was a few yards behind him pulling her foot out of the muck again. "Why do we need to do all this?"

"They can survive on their own, sure." She agreed. "But the more help we give them, the better their odds, and the more they realize they can trust us." She pulled her foot out with a wet squelch. "For me that isn't really an issue. But you and Steve are still a relatively fresh pairing. This'll be the first time you've ever helped him with a mate's clutch. It'll go a long way with him." She grunted as the other foot sunk through the muck. "Gods dammit." She cursed.

"Ugh, goddamit." James said under his breath. He walked over to a nearby tree and kneeled down, removing his bottomless bag from his shoulders as he did. "Come on." He said. "Stand on the roots for a minute. I might have something that can help you."

She pulled her foot out and made her way to him, only getting stuck once more in the process.

James rooted through the contents of the bottomless bag for a minute, feeling his way through the contents as he did. After a moment he found one of the things he was looking for, a plastic grocery bag that he'd been using for dirty laundry when he'd been on earth. He pulled it out, and a moment later he found the other one, the thick plastic pouch that MRE's came in.

"Here." He said. "Stick your feet in these, then use some string or rope or something to tie them tight. Your feet'll still get cold. But this should keep the mud out."

Gixelle pulled a few strips of cloth off of one of her sleeves and used them to strap the bags to her feet. She tentatively took a step away from the tree. Her foot cracked through the frost and she plunged into the mud underneath again. But after a moment of waiting, she looked back at him with a smile.

"Thanks." She said. "That's a lot better."

"Just make sure you clean your feet real well when we get back." He said.

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Steve was outside the den when they arrived. As James entered the small clearing the massive drake stopped what he was doing and his head snapped

to look at the two of them. His mouth had streams of black smoke pouring out of the sides. It was as intimidating as James had ever seen the massive lizard.

"Hey boy." He said as he raised his hands above his head. "It's just me and your mother in law." He joked. He knew Steve didn't understand what he was saying. But humor had always been how he handled stress. "We just brought some stuff to help you guys out."

A low, deep, growling snarl emanated from the hole of the den. Steve's neck puffed out several times as he sniffed the air.

"Hands where he can see them." Gixelle said from beside him. "Move slow, maintain eye contact. I'm gonna move away from you so that he can keep an eye on me at the same time." Sure enough she slowly stepped a few yards off to his right, with her hands up in the air. "He's in defensive father mode right now. Odds are that at least a few other drakes have come sniffing around. But Steve's a big ole variant, so they probably didn't stick around to start anything."

James did what she said and kept his hands up, and looked Steve in the face. After a few tense moments of sniffing the air, Steve slowly walked up to him, head low. He began sniffing James, and sniffing the pack on James's back.

James fell back on the trick that had always worked on Steve from day one. His hands shot out and dug deep into Steve's neck fur, scratching hard and deep into the skin underneath.

The tension in the air, and the latent, bestial, hostility that Steve exuded seemed to evaporate almost immediately. Steve leaned into James's scratching fingers, his back leg tamping at the ground rapidly.

"Yeah, I bet that broken tree over there just aint doin it the way you like, huh boy?" He asked.

There was another snarl from the den. Steve's head shot up, and he let out a low rumble. Maxel's head popped out of the den. She looked at James and Steve, then at Gixelle. She started to move out, but Gixelle waved her hands at the yellow drake.

"Stay there girl. I'll come to you." She winked at James. James had the sense that that was her way of saying, 'good job' before she began walking towards the den. "No need to make the pregnant one try to squeeze out of that tiny hole. Plenty of that's gonna happen soon anyways." She joked as she pushed Maxel's head back into the den and then followed behind it.

The two of them spent a few minutes playing and joking with their beasts. Then they began pulling the supplies out of their bags and setting them up for the drakes.

The main part of the supplies was a sort of tent like canvas structure that was designed to go over the entrance to the den. One end of it

staked into the ground at the apex of the den's hill like top. The other end was a wide triangular structure that extended about ten yards out from the entrance of the den and was held up by three long poles and some rope that was staked down as well. It's only real purpose was to keep the snow, and any water from building up around the entrance so that the drakes would be able to get in and out without any issue.

There were also a couple of hides that Gixelle staked around the actual entrance itself. The drakes sniffed at them curiously for a moment, but when Gixelle was done they were able to push past them easily. These helped keep the warm air in and the cold air out. Then Gixelle pulled out a metal pipe that was about fifteen feet long and pushed it through the dirt at the back of the den so that it was sticking out of the top. This would keep the air flowing in case they got snowed in anyways.

It took nearly an hour to get it all set up and fine tuned to where they were satisfied with it. The drakes, mainly Steve, sniffed and randomly tested almost every part of it, especially the hide door flaps. But they seemed to get the idea.

Finally the two of them offloaded more carcasses for the drakes to eat, though based on the bones and detritus scattered around James guessed they didn't need to. Gixelle threw a couple chickens into the den which Maxel snatched up greedily. James gave Steve one last set of scratches and then hugged the massive drake's head before he and Gixelle started the long slog back to town.

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"So." James said as they hiked back. "What do you think the babies will look like?" He asked.

"Adorable." The massive woman gushed as she pulled her foot out of the muck again. "I hope they're dark purple with green spots and fur all over."

James tried to picture the mixture and kept thinking of snow leopards in pimp colors.

"I was hoping for yellow with black fur down the back." He countered.

"Ooh, that'd be good." Gixelle agreed. "I just hope they have Maxel's viper head."

"That would be cooler than Steve's massive komodo head." He admitted.

"What's a komodo?" She asked curiously.

"One of the closest things my world has to a dragon or drake. In fact their full name is komodo dragon. Steve actually looks a lot like one, just scaled up like eight hundred percent or something. And no fire." He said.

"If they don't breath fire, than why do you call them dragons?" She asked.

"I don't know." He admitted. "Probably because they look like the dragons from our old legends and fairy tales.

"Hmmm. I wonder if you guys had dragons in the past." She mused as she pulled out of the mud again.

"There's been theories actually." He said as he also pulled a boot out of the mud. "But most of them are about how there were probably a few lingering dinosaur descendants or how people just exaggerated things because of how boring it was back then."

"What's a dinosaur?"

"Oh boy." He started. "Not really sure where to start with that one." He thought for a minute ago. "Do you know what a billion is?" He asked.

Gixelle shook her head.

"Oh. Yeah." He said. "This is gonna take some hard core explaining. Okay. So you know what a hundred is. And a thousand. Right?"

She nodded. "Of course."

"Okay. How bout..... I don't know. A hundred thousand."

Again Gixelle nodded.

"Okay. Take a hundred thousand now imagine a ten of those." He waited, watching Gixelle's face scrunch as she tried to imagine the number in her head. "That's a million."

"That's.... a lot." She said after a moment.

"Well. A billion, is a hundred of THOSE."

"My head's starting to hurt." She admitted.

"Well the math is over for now." He assured her. "But dinosaurs lived like three hundred BILLION years before me or any of my people lived. Huge lizards like Steve and Maxel, and all the other dragon kind." He said. "But again... no fire breath. Or at least I don't think any of them had that. I can't be sure though."

"How do your people know of them then?" She asked.

"Well. We've found them, or you know their bones, deep in the ground." He answered.

"Ah. So your dwarves must have found them while mining." She said. "Or else you learned of them from people from your world's deep dark."

James shook his head. "No. Remember; My world doesn't have dwarves, or a deep dark. ^(Except maybe the ocean.) We just have humans."

"Then why were your people digging so deep?"

"Oof. That's a whole different can of worms." He said.

"Your people can worms?" She asked.

"What? No." He said, with a hint of exasperation. "Well maybe. I don't know. It's just a phrase."

The two of them kept hiking through the mud. The stupid conversation made the miles fly by.

But by the time they got back, both of them had headaches for two entirely different reasons.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tl5v64/wait_is_this_just_gate_110/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (108/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tia5zl/wait_is_this_just_gate_107/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Cuteness. Progress with the Colonel's attitude. Medicine.

Fun fact: When I was in the Army, me and the other medics would routinely play beer pong with tourniquets around our dominant arms. The last few cups always got really fun to watch. On a completely related note, I got really good at playing beer pong lefty as a result.

Anyways. Enjoy.

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James woke up later that morning in his bed. He didn't remember getting there, so he figured Amina must have carried him. She was strong enough to do so, he knew. She was wrapped around him, with his head resting on her chest. He moved his arms around her and held her tightly, remembering the tear laden conversation from the night before.

He stayed that way for a while. At least until she woke up some time later, yawning as she pulled him in tighter.

"^(Gooo)OD morning." She said as she finished yawning. She stretched her arms out behind him, shaking the hand of the arm that had been under his head.

"Morning." He said. He kissed her collar bone. "Thank you."

"For what?" She asked as she rubbed her eyes.

"For last night."

She wrapped her arms around him again, squeezing lightly. "Of course." She replied. "Now let's get up and find some breakfast. I'm about five different kinds of sore from last night."

He held her like that for just a moment longer, then they both got up and dressed for the day.

Before he put his boots on he pulled out his phone and the drone control tablet, and sent a short message back to the other side.

He still felt bad about his newfound wealth. But he felt better.

When they stepped out of the yurt, it was snowing lightly.

The flakes were large and fluffy, and they melted almost as soon as they hit the ground. But the effect was still impressive. The fat, soft, snowflakes drifting lazily to the ground in a city of yurts and dragons. Even though it reminded James of how foreign his setting was, he couldn't help but enjoy the visual.

He craned his head back at an angle, and stuck out his tongue.

"Oh James. It's gorgeous." Amina said as she caught one of the flakes on the sleeve of her coat. She turned and saw the position he was in. "What are you-"

James held up a finger, moved his head to the side a bit, and caught one of the large flakes on his tongue. He looked at her with a large, dumb, smile on his face.

She chuckled. "What are you doing?" She asked.

"What?"He asked. "You've never caught snow flakes on your tongue?"

She tried not to laugh. "Not since I was a little kid." She admitted.

He smiled, then craned his head back. "Nobody is too old to catch a snow flake." He said, before sticking his tongue back out and snatching another one out of the air.

Amina began full on laughing at the sight. Then James began running after her, tongue still out.

"Yu gutta ketch a snuflek!"He yelled past his protruding tongue as she jogged away from him, cackling as she did.

His neighbors, few as they were, watched the young lovers with amusement. Though, a few of them did stick their tongues out too.

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"Alright everyone!" General Krick said to the control room. "How's our party doing?" He stood in front of the observation window, looking down at the five people who were set to travel to the other side.

"Prep is done sir. Door ready to open up at your command." A tech said from behind him.

The General waved at the people down below, then held a thumb up for them to see. Several of them were busy checking each other's packs. But two of them saw the questioning signal, turned to talk to the others, and then a moment later a bunch of thumbs went up in response.

"Alright. We got thumbs up." He said as he turned around. "Go ahead and ring the bell." He turned back around and gave a little half assed salute to the group as the lights changed to red.

The familiar sparking circle began to flicker to life.

"Secondary reactor kicking on." Another tech said. "Levels are good. No draw over this time. We're green sir. The sub shouldn't even be needed."

"Good." He replied. Below him the door finally stabilized in its usual position a few inches off the ground. The leader of the party, Master Sergeant Nguyen, gave him one last thumbs up. The General returned it, and the MSG picked up the two cases next to him, and stepped through. The other four followed quickly after.

"Aaaaand all members have translated. Are we a go for the test sir?"

He watched for a moment, then turned back. "Do it." he said. Then he quickly turned back to the window. He needed to see this.

It took a moment, but several small objects were pushed through, four in total.

"That was all they had to send on this attempt sir."

"Shut it down." He replied.

Below him the circle began to flicker again, then after a few moments it disappeared entirely. The lights flicked back from red, to their normal white. Numerous technicians in hazmat suits quickly moved forward and retrieved the two cages, a small wooden box, and one clear container.

They waved numerous devices over them, scanning for radiation, toxins, foreign elements, anything that might be hazardous. As soon as the devices gave them the green light they lifted the containers and put them into clear plexiglass boxes and sealed them in. But the head of the team looked up at the control room as they were wheeled away, and shook their head.

Damn. He thought.

Another tech piped up. "We've got a bowl with several fish, two birds, and one small mammal sir. Plus a package of non-biological material. Initial reports are that none of them survived the transit. Further testing required." They paused

He stood there thinking for a moment.

"Well." He started. "We've got a somewhat successful return trip. Our friend on the other side, and Captain Choi warned us that nothing would survive it." He paused. "This just confirmed. The bio team is doing standard resuscitation procedures on the critters?" He asked the tech who'd given the report.

"Yes sir. Vets are doing what they can." They replied.

"Alright. Well, fingers crossed that some of em get back up. Give me reports as soon as we get em." He said as he began walking out.

As he did he passed the Colonel, who fell into step behind him.

"At least they came through." She said. he didn't reply. "Captain Choi sent us another message."

"What about?" He asked as he fished out his pack of smokes.

"He was wondering when we'd be able to put him in contact with his family, if at all. Also some financial concerns."

"Financial concerns?" The General asked as he put a smoke in the corner of his mouth. "The guy's in a different world. What's he got to worry about?"

"His family sir." She replied, for once not sounding cold about the matter. "He wanted to know if he could have his pay rerouted to his mother."

The General stopped in his tracks, cigarette still not lit.

"Were we not already doing that part?" He asked.

"I don't believe so sir." She admitted.

He lit the cigarette as he resumed walking. "Just make it happen. Captains pay, hazard pay, all that stuff. I already know the poor woman's worried. It's the least we can do."

"Yes sir." She answered. "And letting them talk sir?" She asked.

He sighed, exhaling the minty smoke he'd pulled in. "Eh, we were gonna have to do that eventually. After all, the kid aint dead or anything, much as he tries to be some times." He took another drag as they stepped into his office. "Have the legal people come up with a couple of NDA's and doublecheck the mom for security clearance purposes. We'll have to

sit down and talk to her face to face before we tell her anything too in depth. But she should have some kind of idea of what's going on." He sat down in his chair and gestured for her to sit.

"Is that a good idea sir?" She asked, though the tone was more curious than anything.

"Probably not. But I promised Choi that I'd do what I could to get him in touch with them. I'm a man of my word." He said as he pulled up the feed to the room where the techs were inspecting the animals and materials they'd received. He puffed out more smoke. "In the mean time, we'll send Choi instructions to record a message for her. No visuals, just audio. Give him the rules on what he can and cannot say. Then we'll check it and if its good, show it to her." He zoomed in on one of the cameras and looked at one of the dead creatures, it looked like a cross between a hedgehog and a lizard. "What the fuck is that?" He asked, turning the screen for her to see.

Her eyebrows raised a bit and she tilted her head. "Alien life?" She wondered.

"Is it considered alien if it's from a different dimension?" He asked.

"That's a question for the scientists." She replied. "Looks alien to me though."

"Fuckin' hedge-guana or some shit." He said with a chuckle.

"I'll let the vets know that we have an official designation for it sir." She said with a wry grin.

He let out a quick chuckle, thick with minty smoke. "Don't be a smartass Colonel." His tone let her know he was joking. "Get started on Choi's financial stuff. I'll work with legal on getting his mother in the loop." He said.

She nodded and was about to get up and walk out when he spoke up again.

"You almost don't seem mad at him about wanting to give his pay to his mom." The General said, more a statement than a question.

She paused. "I can.... understand his concern." She said finally. "I've been there."

"Turns out he's human just like the rest of us." The General said simply. Then he turned back to his computer and began typing. She took that as the sign to leave.

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King Farrick stood in the castle's healing ward talking to the Chief Healing Mage, a tall yet well bearded elf named Cin'lo. The ward was mostly empty, with only a few soldiers complaining of sprains and bruises, and some castle staff with other minor issues.

"So you're saying that the texts that the Hero's people sent over have been a help?" He asked Cin'lo.

"Very much so." The elf replied. "We've only applied a small portion of the knowledge so far. Mainly some of the understanding of how veins and arteries work and where they're located. Also only to humans, since that's what their books are written for. But some of our researchers have been working on translating the knowledge to the other races whose physiology is similar enough that the same principles might apply."

The King's eyes widened a bit as the tall man spoke. After a moment he had to interrupt.

"What kind of change have we seen?" He asked.

"Oh." The elf said as he realized that he'd been confusing the king a bit. "Well, we applied some of the methods that the books had on some of the victims of that brawl in the copper district a few days ago. We were able to save some of the injured from wounds that would have likely resulted in amputations, maybe even death." He pulled a small notebook from the desk they were standing by and quickly flipped to an already marked page. "Having seen injuries like these before, from other brawls, battles, fighting tournaments. I'd say we probably saved twice as many people, and prevented far more permanently crippling injuries." He said after a moment.

"All that just from one part of the knowledge they sent?" The King asked, amazed at the result.

"All that from a single.... 'intervention' is the term they called it. Just a simple device that they use for traumatic injuries." He said.

The elf walked to one of the bags they sent out with traveling healers when there were reports of injuries in the city. He pulled out a leather strap that had a metal ring, a clasp, and a section of metal bar on it.

King Farrick recognized it immediately as being nearly identical to the device James had used to help Artair survive being shot in the leg.

"This?" He asked, holding the small device.

"Yes sir. Arch Mage Marcos had several dozen of them made by the royal craftsmen. We've been using them for two weeks now, and the results are already incredible." He looked in his notebook again. "Injuries that would typically be fatal are now proving less so. People are actually surviving long enough to get to a proper healing facility where they can be stabilized. Just because of these things."

"Incredible." The King said, still looking at the small leather and metal device. "What else have you managed to learn and apply?" He asked.

Cin'lo smiled. "Please your highness, right this way. We've started to delve into the section about infectious disease. The healers of Earth have these incredible things called 'Anti-biotics'.

The two of them began walking towards a different part of the ward.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (106/?)

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*Writer's note: (Jeremy Clarkson voice) INTONIGHTSEPISODE..... Kela gets a new axe. Taga draws a sketch. And James gets his collar bone broken. (****^(Don't worry, not really.)****)*

Enjoy.

Edit: Added just a tiny little bit that I'd forgotten.

\~

James hated banks.

"And sign here." The bank clerk said, pointing at the space. James dipped the quill into the pot of lightly glowing ink, tapped it, then signed on the line. The clerk dusted the signature in some black sand. "Alright. That's all there is to it Captain Choi. Your Royal Treasury Bank holdings are official. It'll take a day or two for them to process at the Capital Treasury. And your Hero's Mark has been designated as a Seal of Authorization. Was there anything else you needed help with."

James sighed. "No. I think that's just about everything. Thank you."

"Our pleasure sir." She slid a stack of folded papers and a small purse of coins across the desk. "There's your Sales papers, and the two and a half gold tabs worth of mixed currency that you requested. Have a nice day."

James took them with a smile, then turned back to where Kela was waiting in the lobby. She looked almost as bored as he was. But less angry.

He had hated banks ever since he was a kid. Ever since they'd screwed his mother, and by extension him and his brother too, after his father's death. He knew, nowadays at least, that the banks had been in dire straights at the time. The war had destabilized a lot of the world, his mother wasn't the only one who'd been hung out to dry. But seeing the stress she'd gone through, that all his family had gone through as they'd had to band together to survive the aftermath of everything. Well, the banks had become the entity he'd associated that with to an extent.

Plus he'd always hated paperwork, and it seemed that even in this world banks loved paperwork.

"Well." He said as she stood up to join him. "That was like dragging my balls through a field of broken glass."

Kela's head tilted to the side, like it always did when she was confused.

"It didn't seem that bad." She said. "You were only up there for about half an hour."

"Fair." He admitted. "It could have been worse. You coulda told me ahead of time that I had an expense account." he said.

"Yeah. Sorry." She replied. "Like you said, it just kind of wasn't an issue before. But with us traveling more and more. I suppose we should have done this sooner. At least the finders fee for the Elemental Glass Stone and the bounty on the Grinner have padded it a bit." She shrugged. "Not that you needed it."

"Yeah. That's another thing." He started. "Five hundred gold a month? Have I even used that much since I've been here. Hell, have I even used five hundred gold total? Regardless of whether most of it was footed by the crown?"

She thought about it for a moment as they stepped out of the front doors. After a bit of mental math she answered. "Well, if you consider the Mage's Blade to be a gift, rather than an expense, then you've probably only barely gone over six hundred, maybe seven."

"And most of that WAS covered by the king." He said.

"Most of it yes." She agreed.

"So I have a few THOUSAND gold in that account. Just sitting there FROM that monthly allowance?" He asked rhetorically.

"Yes."

"Plus the ten thousand from the Grinner?"

"And, once the Elemental deposit has been fully evaluated, a sum equivalent to a tenth of its total value." She added.

"How much is that gonna be?"

"Well I don't know too much about the price of Elemental Glass Stone. Or how its quality is evaluated, especially with yours being.... well, new, as it were." She said. "But it's going to be a lot. Veliry would be a better person to ask. But I would guess somewhere in the one hundred to two hundred thousand range."

James stopped in his track. Kela stopped and looked back at him.

"One to two hundred..... THOUSAND?" He asked, jaw slack.

"Yes." She said simply.

James tried to wrap his head around the figure.

"Gold?"

"Yes."

"And a single gold is enough to buy a room at an inn or tavern for what... a week or so? Depending on how nice the place is. Or a full set of nice clothes, full outfit?" He asked.

"At most inns, and yes unless it's banquet attire." She answered.

He did mental math. That made a single gold piece worth anywhere from two to three hundred dollars, give or take. So he had what..... millions.... of dollars.

James's face went as blank as his brain was. His emotions having as much difficulty processing the idea as his mind was.

"So I'm like..... really rich now?" He asked.

"Well." She began. "You're pretty well off. You'll be even richer once the deposit has been fully evaluated. That'll probably be another month or two. Also, that's only if they don't split it between you, Grescia, that young mage, and Veliry. Though Veliry probably won't care, as long as she gets all the research data." She thought. "Also, they probably won't. After all, it only got turned into the Glass Stone because of you."

James didn't hear any of that.

He was rich. The thing he'd wanted for so long so that he could finally give something back to his mother besides flowers and the occasional gift card. So he could finally help support his brother, whose condition made it hard for him to maintain employment or pass his classes.

He could do all of that. He could put both of them in a mansion if he wanted to.

If only he were back on Earth.

James's heart ached deeply with homesickness at the thought.

"James?" Kela asked, breaking him out of his melancholy for a moment. "Are you okay?"

James fought to keep from tearing up. Then put on a fake smile.

"Yeah." He answered, not sure if it had convinced her. Hell, it didn't even convince him. "Yeah. I'm fine. Let's go get that armor." He said. "Hell. Maybe we can find something for you too." He added.

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"Bend. Twist. Pretend you're using your weapon." Teira instructed him as he stood in front of the mirror.

James did as he was told. Running through a couple of the exercises that he'd been taught over the past few months. Seeing how the armor moved on his body.

"It kind of pinches right," James pointed just below his arm pit. "here. On both sides."

Teira stepped up and placed a finger between the pieces of armor. "Do what makes it pinch." She said. He did, and she winced just a bit. Then she pulled her finger out and marked the spot with a piece of charcoal."Yeah, we'll have to move it out a bit. For a skinny liitle guy, you have more muscle than it looks like." She pulled his arm up over his head, as if he was trying to touch his opposite ear. "Pinching here?" She poked his trapezius muscle.

"A bit of rubbing, but not too bad." He said. Then he put his hand on the stomach of the front plate. "Bit loose here. I feel a bit of space between my stomach and the plate." She marked both of those spots too.

She tapped it with a knuckle and listened to the slightly muffled ring. "Yep. Skinny. That's easy though. Anywhere else?"

"No. That's all I'm feeling." He said as he did a few more motions.

Taga chimed in as Teira started helping James get the armor off. "Alright." He said. "That's the last piece we needed to motion-fit. The rest is simple measurements." Teira measured his biceps with a piece of string. "So, what's your preferred method of fighting?"

James thought about it. It was tempting to say 'a hundred yards away while looking through my sights' but he knew that Taga wouldn't get the reference.

"In a perfect world where every fight I'm in happens how I plan it?" He asked jokingly.

"If that world existed, I think I'd be out of a job." Taga responded with a light chuckle.

"True." James agreed. "Um. Well I'm primarily a sword and shield user. But I also have a long length of chain that I use some times."

"And you're a member of Clan Drakrid." Taga added. "So I'm assuming mounted combat as well. Yeah?"

"Haven't had the chance yet. But yeah. That too." James agreed.

"Alright." Taga said, picking up the armor that James had brought with him. Teira grabbed the ones that James had just tried on. "I'll sketch up a few ideas. If you wanna look around the shop and see if you like anything. I should only be about twenty or thirty minutes. Then you can pick which design you like and we'll start workin'."

"Alright." James said. And with that, Taga and Teira went back behind the counter and started sketching ideas on some parchment.

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An hour later, James and Kela walked out of the shop. James had put a hundred gold down as a deposit on the armor, the other one fifty would be paid once the armor was done and met his desires.

He was impressed by the lightness and durability of drake scale armor. There were a few panels of different metals in the shop that customers were allowed to test out. A hammer, dagger, and spear were nearby to test them with. The steel had performed pretty much how James had expected, bending and denting for the hammer, and pierced by the dagger and spear, albeit with a fair bit of effort. A square of dark green metal had been significantly more resistant to the damage, but had also been significantly heavier. The square of drake scale armor, which had a light bronzish hue, performed almost as well as the green metal, but weighed maybe half as much as the steel had. It also seemed to flex more, which he assumed was how it avoided most of the hammer damage. It rebounded as opposed to crumpled.

He was excited to see what a full set of armor made from it would be capable of withstanding. Though, he hoped to never need to test it first hand.

Kela, meanwhile, had purchased a new wolf helm made from the stuff, as well as a new great axe. According to Teira, there wouldn't be a huge difference in performance. The lightness of the axe would make it so she could swing and defend faster with it, but that would also give it less of an impact when it connected. But in exchange for that trade off she got increased durability, and an edge that wouldn't need to be sharpened as often.

"What made you choose their shop?" She asked James as they walked.

James shrugged. "Just a chance meeting with Teira in the market lane. Bit of luck, that's all. And when I met Taga I kinda like the guy. He seems genuine."

"He does, doesn't he?" She agreed. "I'm excited for a new helm."

"That design he showed you did look pretty badass." He said.

Suddenly, and unexpectedly, a hand clamped down on James's shoulder. James jumped in shock at the firmness of the grip. Then he heard a voice that he was both happy to hear, and a little scared of.

"Hello darling." Said Amina, from behind him.

James didn't look back, but instead turned to Kela.

"You knew she was coming from behind us didn't you?" He asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about." The werewolf said from beside him. She was doing a poor job of hiding her grin.

"Uh huh. Sure." James said as he turned around with a big, partly forced smile on his face. "Hey Amina." He said nervously.

Once again he fell back on his Army training. *If the enemy hits you with a surprise attack, return the favor.* He thought. *Luckily she's not my enemy, but the principle stands.*

He grabbed her around the waist and pulled her into an embrace and kissed her. She struggled for just a moment, before kissing him back. But he knew it wasn't really struggling. He'd seen her fight after all. He knew that if she'd wanted to she could've escaped the embrace with ease, or used it to launch him across the street and into a wall, and neither would even make her break a sweat. So the struggle was just a gesture of frustration more than anything.

He didn't see it, but Kela made a point of not looking, and also silently leaving the area.

After the kiss broke off she whispered to him. "That's not fair. I'm mad at you." She stopped to breath for a second. Then added. "And happy that you're okay."

"I know." He said, looking down. "How bout we go talk about this somewhere more private?"

She nodded. So he took her hand and led her back to his new house away from the castle.

I think that might have worked. He thought. *Or at least I hope it did.*

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Wait, is this just GATE? (105/?)

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Writer's note: James goes in for an upgrade.

Enjoy.

Edit: Had to reupload due to screwing up the title.

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The Den was as big, and full of life, as James had thought it was when he'd first seen it from the nearby hilltop the day before. He immersed himself into it almost immediately after waking up and having a chance to recover from the minor hangover he'd gotten from the night before.

Everywhere he went there were people from species he'd never even seen in the capital city. He also saw dragon-kind of every size, color, and variant type. At one point a large silver metallic wyvern flew low over the city's market street dropping small silver scales as it shook itself midair. The various shop keeps and craftsman all let up whoops and hollers as the beast continued on, its rider waving over his shoulder at all of them. James picked up one of the scales that fell nearby and saw that it was like a wide, thick, fish scale. Only it looked as though it had been made from pure silver.

"Gonna keep that?" A middle aged woman in a blacksmith's apron asked as she picked up more of the scales around them. She stuffed them into the front pocket of her apron. She had a voice that reminded James of his aunt who'd chain smoked her whole life.

"Uh. I don't know." James admitted "What are they good for?"

"A single scale like that?" She asked. "Maybe an earring or a necklace or something." She held her apron pocket open and showed him the bounty of scales inside. "Enough of em though, and you can make drake scale gear. Treasure-hide variants, like that one that Vitar just rode past on, have the best scales for it."

James looked at the shiny scale curiously. After a moment he clenched his hand around it and tucked it into his pocket.

"Think I'll keep this one." He said. "I can think of someone who'd like a bit of jewelry."

"Suit yourself." The smith said.

James was about to leave when he remembered a question he'd had since meeting Grescia.

"Say. I take it you make Drake-Scale gear?" He asked.

The woman turned back, as if surprised that he was still there. "I don't." She said. "But my brother does. Why? You interested in some?"

James shrugged. "Kinda. I don't know much about it other than what it's made of."

The woman pulled out a small metal coin. It had an engraving of an anvil with a dragon's wings coming off of it.

"Two rows east of here. Look for that sign." She said. Then she went back to scooping up the shiny silver scales, not that there were many left.

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"Good evening." Said the large gray skinned man inside the weapon shop. "How can I help you today?"

James looked at the coin the woman had given him. Then he looked at the sign on the counter that the man was behind. Then he looked at the man.

There's no way in hell that those two are actually siblings. He thought.

"Hi. Uuuuuhhh." He started. "I got this coin from a woman over in the market. Said that this was the place to go for Drake-Scale gear."

"That's us. You must have met Teira." The large man said. He had to be almost eight feet tall, James guessed, and was almost touching the top of the yurt with his head.

"Yeah." James admitted. "She said that her brother made some."

The man seemed to read his mind. Though, James guessed that it was more likely that it was a common issue.

"Before you ask. We were both orphans together. Adopted by the same person." He said with a smile.

"Fair enough." James said. "I take it that people ask that question a lot?"

"It comes up." The man said. "I'm Taga. How can I help you?" He asked while extending his hand.

James took it. "James. Nice to meet you."

"So, what're you lookin for James?" Taga asked.

"I... honestly don't know." He admitted. "Like I told your sister, I don't really know much about the stuff. But I got to see some in action a little while back, and it looked awesome."

Taga nodded as he listened. "Say." Taga began after James was done talking. "Are you that Summoned Hero that everyone's been buzzin' about?" He asked while pointing at the medallion that was pinned to James's jacket.

James nodded meekly, he still wasn't used to being recognized yet.

"So, when you say that you 'saw some in action'... You mean that you saw Grescia the Arbalestier? Don't you?"

James nodded. "Uh. Yeah." James admitted.

Taga nodded, but James got the sense that it was less a gesture of understanding and more one of light sadness.

"Sorry to say." Taga started. "That unfortunately, our gear doesn't quite compare to the stuff that Grescia and his wife have made. Not many do really."

"Oh. Really?" James asked. "I mean I know that they've worked super hard for years to refine what the stuff is capable of. I'm.... not looking for anything that high end." James said, trying to reassure the large man.

"Don't get me wrong." Taga replied. "The quality of our armor is up there with the best. And being set up here in The Den makes getting the scales nice and easy, same as any other blacksmith here." He rubbed his neck. "But neither me or Teira are mages, much less enchantment crafters. That's where Grescia's gear gets all its power. That wife of his is one of the best enchanters in the land."

"Oh. That's fine." James said. "I don't need anything that fancy. I just wanted to, maybe, get something a touch better than my gear." He chuckled. "I'm not trying to launch myself fifty feet into the air or anything crazy like that. But all I've got for armor is a couple pieces of steel plate and chain mail." He admitted. He didn't mention the gear he had from back on Earth.

"Well then. I'm pretty sure that we can do better than that." Taga said with a wide smile.

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James entered the yurt that he'd chosen before the previous nights party. The Clan's attendants had already fitted the exterior with a series of colored cloth panels, each of them either dark purple or black, and the doors and windows were edged with pelts of a thick blackish brown fur. It was a bit much for his sense of taste. But he had to admit that it looked nice, and he had no doubt that it would help the yurt stay warm through the winter.

The inside was spartan by default. There was a large fire pit just off center of the room with a smoke stack rising up through the roof. The bed was a large wood and fur monstrosity off in the back. There were few dressers, a small padded bench, and a table with a few chairs next to it. Other than that it was just a wide open space with a wooden floor beneath it. A door off to the right led to the section of the tent that was meant for Steve, whenever he got back.

Kela was napping on the bench. She'd gotten significantly more drunk than James had the night before. He'd woken to find her sleeping on the bench and had decided not to wake her. If she weren't in her full wolf form, and as a result significantly larger than him, he would have put her in the bed before he'd left.

James quietly walked into the room and over to where his bags were. He opened one and rummaged around in it. He was still amazed at how the bags could hold so much more than they should have been able to. The way you could look into them and see absolutely nothing, but could then reach in and FEEL the things that were in it, and yet never feel the walls of the container.

The first bag was the one with all his clothes in it. He switched to the other bag, reached in and felt what he was looking for. He began pulling pieces of metal armor out and placing them on the ground.

He tried to be quiet. But one of his shoulder plates ended up catching on the edge of the bag and fumbling out of his hands. It clanged and clattered loudly on the wooden floor. James cringed at the noise.

Kela's ears flattened to her head as she slowly opened her eyes and looked over. James had a feeling that if she hadn't been in so much pain, she probably would have looked angry and, thanks to her lupine features, predatory.

"Why?" She asked quietly.

"Sorry." James said. "I was trying to be quiet."

Kela looked around, noticed the light coming from the opening of the front door.

"What time is it?" She asked.

"Um... Close to noon I guess." James answered.

"Oh gods. My head hurts." She said as she slowly rolled over and landed on the floor and began lifting up to her feet. "What're you doing with your armor?" She asked. As she asked the question, her mind seemed to realize what that might imply. Her eyes widened and her ears perked up and began searching for sounds. "Why do you need your armor?" She asked, sounding more awake now.

"Relax." He said, hands up in a calming gesture. "I'm just taking them in to see about getting some upgrades at one of the local armorers."

She relaxed at that. "Oh." She said. "Okay then." Her ears dropped back down and pressed back to her head again, as if remembering that noise hurt her head. "I need breakfast." She said and then began looking around, as if expecting some to be nearby.

"Well then, why don't you come with?" He offered. "I could eat." She nodded in agreement. "By the way." He began to ask. "Do I have money?

It's never really been an issue before. But I was about to try shopping without any of you guys with me, and I realized... I don't have any ACTUAL money."

Her eyes narrowed in confusion. "Um. Yeah, you do... kind of." She said as they walked out the front door together.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (104/?)

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Writer's note: Party Time!

^(I don't really have anything else for this right now.)

Enjoy.

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The feasting tent reminded James of every movie he'd ever watched about vikings or tribal warriors.

It was a massive tent in the style of the rest of the town. But it was at least a hundred yards long and nearly as wide and each side of it had additions that jutted off at random where there were more tables set. Several of them had piles of animal carcasses and openings for the various dragon-kind to enter, both on the ground and from the sky, so that they could join the feast. The tables were loaded with food of all kinds, most of it being things that James hadn't even seen yet, or with casks and barrels of ale and wine that seemed to pour whenever someone wanted it to. Several large fire pits roared in various locations in the tent, filling the air with the scent of smoke as well as the meats that were cooking on them.

The entire room was a roar of activity as Clan members, visitors to the town, family members, cooks and servants, and the drakes and dragons and other mounts themselves all joined and feasted in a massive party.

In the middle of the great tent was a raised platform on which was sat a large circular table. Gixelle sat at this table along with several other Clan Leaders who seemed to be on par with her station. James and, according to Gixelle, five other new riders sat up there as well. Kela and Veliry were lost in the crowd somewhere feasting and rousing with the other party goers.

The people around James seemed to come from all walks of life. On his right was a dwarf with ashen grey skin and red eyes that reminded him of some of the people from the Grabber clan camp. He sported his Clan tattoo

on his cheekbone, right above a massive metal plate that seemed to be holding his jaw in place. James knew what that meant for the man. Despite his rough appearances the dwarf, Klini he called himself, was eager to share drinks and jokes with James.

On his left sat an elf woman who had to be nearly seven feet tall, and if it hadn't been for her pointed ears and the glowing tattoos running down her arms he would have thought she'd just walked off of a catwalk on fashion week. Funnily enough, she was nearly as boisterous as Klini. Though when she told him her name he had to admit to her that he'd never be able to pronounce it, especially if they kept pouring him drinks.

They were just the people closest to him. When he looked around he estimated that there had to be at least five hundred people in the tent. Some were chatting and telling jokes. Some were having drinking contests, and James thought he saw at least one eating contest. There were even a few fights, though only one of them looked like anything serious.

He looked and saw Gixelle raising a toast with a grey haired orc and a woman who could've been Gixelle's younger sister if he didn't know better.

The room was full of laughter, and yelling, and singing.

He was having a great time.

Gixelle interrupted it.

"**CLAN DRAKRID!!!!"** She shouted as she stood up from her chair, mug of ale in hand.

James joined the rest of the clan members, like he knew he should, and responded.

"DRAKRID!"

"It has been a long time!" She continued. "A long time since I've been back at the den!" She said as she gestured to the tent around her. She stood up on her chair, then planted a foot on the edge of the table.

"But, once again, my slutty little drake decided to get all clutched up!" She joked, drawing laughter from the crowd. "Course, based on the size of the crowd tonight, it looks like she aint the only one that had a bit of fun before winter set in." More laughs.

She stepped down and began walking around the table, taking a long pull from her mug as she did.

"As is custom whenever a clan leader calls for a feast." She gestured at herself with a shrug. "We are here tonight to welcome the new members that have been inducted in the past few months. Those few who are present anyways." She grabbed one of the clan members at the table by the shoulders, giving the man a light shake. "Those few whose lizards also

decided to bump uglies!" The man laughed along with some of the other diners nearby.

"So that's what we're doing now!" She added.

Somewhere out in the crowd someone began slamming their cup on their table. Another person somewhere else began to match them. Soon enough the whole tent was drumming their cups, or utensils, or just their fists, to the beat.

"WE'VE GOT SIX OF EM TODAY!" She shouted over the din of the drum beat. "RANGING ALL THE WAY FROM THE NORTH ESTLAND TUNDRA TO THE WESTERN CRAGS!" The beating was getting louder as clan members began competing to out drum each other.

Gixelle held her hands up in a 'quiet down a bit' gesture. The drumming began to die down, but it didn't stop.

"And as I'm sure that most of you have heard by now. We even have a new member who isn't even from our world!" James blushed as heads began to turn his way. He became very aware of the green medallion hanging from his neck. James heard a familiar sounding wolf howl off in one of the corners. A few other werewolves matched it.

The beat began to pick up again.

"But we're not here to brag about them!" She said, yelling again. "They come from all walks of life. Just like the rest of us!" She clapped the grey orc she'd been talking to on the shoulder, having come full circle around the table. "They each have different stories! Different lives, and skills, and goals! And as always, Clan Drakrid welcomes all!"

"DRAKRID!"

"So while this is a celebration welcoming them into our clan!" She said as she raised her mug up in the air. "This is primarily a celebration of our clan growing larger, more diverse, more talented. AND AS A RESULT, **STRONGER**!!!" She said as she raised the mug higher, sloshing a bit of the ale out as she did. The crowd matched her by raising their mugs as well. Though they continued pounding their fists.

"WELCOME THEM, AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, TO CLAN DRAKRID!!!" She yelled before draining her mug.

"DRAKRID!"

With that the mugs, and cups, and steins, and James thought he saw at least one skull (he didn't know what from) all clattered together.

The night got kind of fuzzy shortly after that.

\--------------------------

Amina stood in the crater, looking at the mass of Elemental Glass Rock in front of her with fascination. She'd seen deposits of the swirling, magic infused, black glass before. But never a freestanding monolith of it, and never when it was new.

The soldiers nearby didn't stop the excavation, hammering small pieces of the valuable material off of the Elemental's grave and into cloth lined buckets. There were also royal mages studying the deposit with all manner of devices. Some were leaning up against the mass with ladders, others were at nearby tables studying pieces that had already been extracted.

"He did all this?" She asked, more speaking to herself than anyone else. "He made this all by himself?"

Melit spoke up from beside her. "He had help ma'am. A young mage from the eastern academy, and an Arbalestier according to the Captain's report. Plus the Arch Mage apparently gave it a hell of a fight.

Amina looked at the stone beneath her hand again.

She voiced her thoughts. "How the hell did he do this?" She asked.

"Captain Swiftrunner asked him exactly that." Melit replied. "He created this hole we're currently standing in, though it's been widened a bit for the excavation. Then he, I'm quoting here ma'am, 'added fuel to the fire to get it hotter' and then he had the mage seal the hole up on top of it."

"And that did all this?" She asked.

"The hero then went on to explain something called a vacuum, which Arch mage Veliry gave some notes on, she kind of scribbled them here." Melit squinted at the paper. "Something about negative pressure in an enclosed space. What's OX-I-GAIN?" She handed the report to Amina.

She began reading it as they walked out of the crater.

How does he keep doing these things? She wondered.

"Let's go." She said instead. "There's still day light. And we're only another day or so from catching up."

"Yes Ma'am." Melit said as she began jogging towards where the griffins were.

\----------

"Well alright then." General Krick said as he stepped into the town car outside of the Pentagon. He lit one of his smokes up as he absent mindedly buckled his seat belt. "Glad to get out of that bullshit." He said.

"Have a good visit sir?" The driver asked as the car began rolling.

"Here? Never." He said with a chuckle, the first bit of smoke already exhaling as he did. "But useful at least. Now, not to be rude or anything Sergeant, but I'm gonna need privacy mode for a few minutes."

"Understood sir." The driver said.

They flipped a few switches on their dashboard, and a black screen divided the front and back of the car from each other. The speakers in the back began playing a fuzzy, and annoying, mixture of white noises. They were designed to prevent anyone from recording anything intelligible.

The general pulled out his phone and placed a call. After only three rings it was picked up.

"This is General Krick." He said. The person on the other side of the phone asked a question. "Yankee flavored hot dog water and chocolate mint milk shakes." He said in response. "Alright. Yeah, not a problem. Now, let the Colonel know that Site Charlie is a go. I'll be back at the A.P.G. site tomorrow. We'll make the choice then. Also the infil site is going to ramp up."

He listened for a moment as the other person asked a few more questions.

"Green status. Whatever we need." He listened. "Nope. That's it. Krick out."

He sat and smoked the CBD/caffeine cigarette for a moment longer, letting the enclosed space fill with the minty smoke for a moment. Then he tapped on the divider. A moment later the white noise stopped as the divider dropped.

"You know where Ted's burgers is Sergeant?" He asked.

"Of course sir."

"Take us there before we hit the hotel. I'll cover you for a bite." He said.

"Roger that sir." The Sergeant said with a smile.

And the town car drove off into the city.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tggsvf/wait_is_this_just_gate_105/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (103/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/te6a4e/wait_is_this_just_gate_102/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: \[GPS voice interrupting your music right at the good part\] YOU HAVE ARRIVED AT YOUR DESTINATION!

\~

"Okay...." James said as he stood on the hill overlooking 'The Den'. "That place. Looks fuckin awesome."

"Told you you'd like it." Gixelle replied coolly from where she stood next to him.

"I've never seen so many dragon-kind before." Kela said from the back of her griffin.

"Like I said." Gixelle countered. " It's the unofficial home of Clan Drakrid."

Below them was a town that, to James, looked like a city made of Mongolian style yurts. The hut-like buildings came in almost every color James could think of. But, upon further observation, James realized that there was a theme to them. They all had a small offset to one side or the other that reminded James of an attached carport on a house. Although for some of them, he assumed the ones for dragons and wyverns, the offset part was up on the top of the hut. Sure enough, as he watched he realized that that was the part of the hut made for the dragon-kind of the riders that, he assumed, were the owners of the huts.

And the color of the hut seemed to be matched to the drake.

"You figuring out the color scheme?" Gixelle asked from beside him.

"They match the mount?" He asked. When she nodded he had to ask. "Does that mean that your hut is yellow with green polka-dots?"

She shrugged. "Sadly. Parts of it are." She admitted. "But as clan mother, mine is a bit fancier."

"Do.... Do I have a hut?" He asked.

"Not yet." She replied. "But we have some blanks that you can pick from. Once you do, the keepers will fit it for you and Steve."

"There's so many." He said.

"I know, right." She said with a grin.

The Den was teeming with life of all kinds, and more than a little of it was the large, scaled, fire breathing creatures that gave the Clan its name.

Even from the hill they were on he could smell the musky, reptilian, odor that he'd become used to from riding Steve for the past months. But he smelled so much more. There were fires burning down there. There was food cooking, and he smelled a hint of alcohol that he thought was probably

beer. He could hear, and see, people partying. There was a ring in which five people were engaging in a fight while people watched. Only a little ways away from that some people were gathered and playing music on a series of instruments that ranged from simple improvised drums, all the way to some kind of massive harp/violin hybrid that James had never seen before. Venders yelled out their wares on corners and under awnings. There were numerous rings as blacksmiths hammered out weapons and armor at their forges.

There were also dragon-kin of all kinds.

Drakes were the most numerous, there seemed to be almost as many as there were people. They came in all shapes and sizes, and sure enough James even saw a few black drakes, and there were even a few bristlebacks. Some were being ridden, some were walking freely, and some simply basked in the sunlight or next to a fire near their riders.

The sky teemed with flying dragons and wyverns and wyrms. There were even hoops and poles erected around the city that the flying riders seemed to fly through at random. Off to the east he saw three dragons working together to lift a massive net full of barrels and crates that must have weighed a ton. They set it down so gently that James thought they'd done a better job than most of the helicopter pilots he'd seen drop off supplies back on Earth. He saw two flyers, a dragon and a wyrm that were doing loops, at the apex of each loop they would drop off of their mount and plummet until the other caught them.

He saw, and heard, and smelled all of this before he'd even set foot in the city. The entire city seemed to be alive with activity of all kinds.

He was about to step forward and begin walking towards it, when Gixelles arm grasped his shoulder and stopped him.

"Aren't we going in?" He asked.

"Not yet." Gixelle replied. "Remember how Artair had to ride a day behind us because Steve and Maxel would kill Xhalya if she got too close?"

"Oh." James said sullenly. "Right." Sure enough, when he looked back both of the drakes were watching the commotion in front of them. Steve's neck was rapidly expanding and contracting as he sniffed at the air. "So we have to find them a place first?"

"Yep." Gixelle turned to Kela and Veliry. "If you guys want to head in. It shouldn't take more than a few hours. Just tell the guards that you're with me. They're already expecting us and they'll show you to my place."

Kela nodded and turned back to the carriage where Veliry was sitting.

\----------

The spot that Maxel and Steve chose was actually pretty nice.

The two of them had gone nearly ten miles, stopping to sniff every so often, from the city before they finally picked a small clearing in some dense trees.

As the two of them began burrowing into the ground James and Gixelle began looking around the area, checking to see what was and wasn't available. There was a small creek coming down between two hills nearby, maybe a quarter of a mile away. There was a large tree that James was certain was going to be snapped in half and used as a scratching post for Steve.

As James looked about he inspected the plants themselves. The area seemed almost tropical compared to the forests around the capital. He even found a tree with fruit that looked very similar to coconuts, though they grew in clusters that hung off the tree like bunches of grapes. He knocked a cluster down with a well placed toss of a rock. When he opened one with his knife he saw that the meat was a light pink, and the juice that flowed out smelled almost like lemon. He wasn't dumb enough to drink or eat any of it, but he'd ask Gixelle about them.

After about an hour the two of them met back up at the den that the two drakes had dug themselves. James popped his head in just long enough to look around inside and saw the two drakes curled up in the back, eyes glowing as they looked at him.

"Alright bud. Looks like the two of you are all set up." He said. "We're gonna leave y'all some food to help you get started. Max, good luck with the babies." With that he popped back out. Gixelle was pulling a couple of different carcasses out of a bottomless bag food sack that she'd brought with her. While she did that James stuffed all of the drake saddle gear into a different bag. She left three goats, a handful of chickens, a large boar and a few racks of ribs that looked like they came off the worlds largest cow to James.

Before they left James pulled a drone from his pocket and used the control pad to set it on one of the taller trees nearby. A quick scan showed nothing impressive to the thermal camera, and if anything showed most of the nearby life seeming to migrate away from where the drakes were.

Smart move everyone. He thought as he watched a small family of wild animals moving in an almost straight line away from the den's location.

"We good?" He asked as he put the tablet back in his pack.

"They're all set. That food should last em a few days." She said as she shouldered her pack too. "See the creek?"

"Yeah. Good water source." He said. "So. How will we know when Maxel lays her eggs?"

Gixelle's face scrunched for a second. "Remember how your bond with Steve lets you feel his pain, and him yours?" She asked.

"Yeah." He replied.

She stared at him. It took a second. Then he realized what she was getting at.

"Oh." He said. Then his eyes widened. "OH."

"Yeah." She said simply. "Trust me, we'll both know."

"Oh god. You're gonna feel her give birth?" He asked.

She nodded, biting her upper lip as she did. "Yeah. And not for the first time either. I've got my three kids." She pulled a water skin out and drank deeply. "And this'll be Maxel's fifth clutch since I've had her."

"Jesus." James said under his breath. "Well. That sucks.... a lot."

"Oh don't worry James." Gixelle said with a devilish grin. "Maxel will make sure that Steve, and by extension you, share a bit of that pain."

"What?" He asked.

"You'll see." She said. Then she began walking back to the city before he could ask any more questions. "Come on!" She yelled over her shoulder. "There's going to be a party tonight! Always is when I come back!"

James looked over his shoulder at the den with the two drakes inside.

"Good luck to both of us I guess bud."

Then he jogged to catch up.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tfqqgm/wait_is_this_just_gate_104/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (102/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tc14zd/wait_is_this_just_gate_101/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: As usual, a bit of a short fillery-ish one after the big action sequence is concluded.

Enjoy.

\~

"There you go miss." The server said as they placed the bowl of soup in front of Amina. "One bowl of our new house special and some warm cider."

Amina thanked the young man as she sat on the deck of the cafe overlooking the lake. It was getting cold, the ground outside of the deck

already frosted over and the lake itself looking gray. But a large fire pit was crackling with warmth only a few yards away to keep her and the other diners warm.

"You said that the Summoned Hero showed you this recipe?" She asked as the server finished setting the tea down.

"Yes ma'am. Only came through here a few weeks back." He replied as he set down a plate with some toasted bread. "It's been a big hit since then. We've even had a few of the other cooks in town come by asking for the recipe."

"That's amazing." She said as she picked up her spoon. "I heard that he did something similar in the capital. But that was some kind of sandwich. Who knew he could make soups too." She said, trying to hid a grin.

"Actually. He calls it a chowder." He said, then shrugged. "Whatever that is."

She nodded, shrugging as well, then took her first bite. The creaminess of the soup was a pleasant surprise compared to the salty chewiness of the meat within. She savored it for a moment, enjoying the flavor of this new soup that James had left in his wake.

First burgers. And now a shellfish soup? What's he going to make next? She wondered as she enjoyed the small bowl of soup.

As she finished the last few spoons of the soup, Sergeant Melit stepped up next to her. She was in traveling clothes that would have been baggy on her, if she hadn't been wearing armor underneath.

Amina looked at her, sad that the moment was over.

"Time to go?" She asked as she placed the bowl on top of the dish the bread had been on.

"Yes ma'am." Melit said simply. "He makes a good soup doesn't he?"

Amina placed a silver coin on the table, thought about it, then replaced it with a gold coin.

"Yes. They've got a great cook." She replied.

"Wasn't talking about the cafe." The Sergeant countered.

Amina blushed a little as she realized what her bodyguard had meant.

"Yes. He does too." She said with a smile. "Even if it isn't HIS recipe." Melit grinned a bit at that as they began walking down the deck stairs and towards where the rest of their group was mounting up.

As they got closer to where the others were preparing, she asked the question that had been eating at her since the night before. When they'd heard the stories passing around the bar at the inn.

"Any word on how they're doing?" She asked.

"According to the unit working extraction, they're all fine. Beat up. Burned pretty damned bad. But apparently they're already back on the road." Melit said. "So I imagine they can't be too bad off."

"That's good." Amina said quietly as she took the reins of her griffin from one of her guards, Sergeant Barneth, with a nod.

"Aye." Melit replied. "Snagged yourself a tough one ma'am." The Sergeant grunted as she mounted her own griffin. Amina mounted hers too. "Tougher than he looks, that's for sure."

"Yes." Amina said, smiling, as she kicked the griffin into motion. "Yes I did."

He's going to need to be when I catch up to him. She thought.

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James felt his nose itching as he rode along. It wanted to sneeze and he was trying to let it, his head back and his arm ready to block it. But the sneeze wouldn't come, it just kept lingering behind his sinuses.

After a minute he pinched his nose and rubbed it.

"I hate that." He said to nobody in particular.

The ride had become less comfortable over the past few days. Next to him Gixelle rode Maxel, who had become noticably larger over the past week. Large enough that Steve was practically curved into a letter C in order to keep entwined with her. What had been uncomfortable in its cuteness at the beginning of the trip, had become annoying. It had also slowed the two drakes down marginally.

On the up side; his hands were almost healed now. The burns had lessened enough that he could hold Steve's reins. They were just flaking off dead skin a lot. And the black webbing hadn't faded just yet. Out of curiosity he'd tried casting just a small puff of wind. His hands had flared as if they were on fire and being hit by a hammer. That had ended that experiment quickly.

"How much longer until we're there?" James asked as he fiddled with the drone control pad. "We've got to be close by now."

"We are." Replied the Clan leader. She was even more uncomfortable than he was. Steve being larger than Maxel by almost six feet meant that she'd been riding side saddle for almost a week now. "Couple more days and we'll be there."

"Should we just tough it out and ride through the nights?" He asked. He didn't like the idea. But they all wanted the trip to be over. Plus, even

though he hadn't brought it up, he was kind of worried about Steve's spine.

"If you want." She replied. "I wouldn't protest. But Maxel might get a bit crabby if she doesn't get some sleep. And this is HER trip after all." She said as she rubbed her knuckles into the drake's back.

"We'll bring it up tonight when we set up camp." He said.

"Works for me." She stretched her arms and legs out, wobbling on Maxel's saddle as she did. "Can't wait to get to the Hatchery."

"I can't wait to see it." He replied. "All those Clan Drakrid members. All the different drakes and dragons and all that. It sounds incredible."

"It is." She agreed. "If the clan can be said to have a home or capital, the Hatchery is it. At least for this continent anyways. You'll see. We'll get you and Steve equipped with some of the finest riding gear and equipment you can get. Hell, we might even see a few other bristleback riders there."

"Bet Vel is gonna like it too. She's been talking about seeing the researcher hub there the entire trip."

"They might have something to help her get her hair back too." Gixelle said with a chuckle. "The researchers there are constantly getting theirs singed off during their studies."

James laughed lightly. "Thank god. It's weird seeing her without her hair."

"Could've been worse." Gixelle replied.

"True." He agreed. The thought ended the lightness of the conversation. The two of them rode in silence for a while.

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In the dark room full of doors, a note is placed.

There are two choices on each side of the note, and blank space beneath those choices.

Next to the note is placed a small pot of wax that is enchanted to stay melted.

Over the course of the next week people come through the other doors.

They read the note.

They pressed their thumbs into the wax.

Then it's pressed to the note, one side or the other.

Then the people leave through their respective doors as quickly as they're able.

Thus, a decision regarding the summoned hero was made.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/teuzj8/wait_is_this_just_gate_103/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (101/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/tb962h/wait_is_this_just_gate_100/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Aaaaaaand back to business.

Here's some info on the rest of the world(s).

Enjoy.

\~

James rode along on Steve's back awkwardly.

His "sunburns" were gone, the healing bandages having made quick work of them by the second day of their stay. But the skin was still tight and awkward.

The big problem was his hands.

They were healing, and they felt a lot better than they had when he'd woken up the day before. But when they'd changed the bandages he'd seen the damage. The burns were bad. But he'd expected that.

The real damage had come from his casting.

When they'd removed the bandages and after they'd, painfully, scrubbed the bad flesh off of the palms and fingers, James had seen the reality of what Veliry had called "Casting beyond your ability".

There were black, web-like, lines all along his hands. They reminded him of pictures he'd seen of people who'd been struck by lightning. The lines had no rhyme or reason that he could discern. They didn't follow his veins, or his musculature, or nerves as far as he could tell. They seemed random.

And they hurt deep. The pain reminded him of a time when he'd broken his finger playing baseball as a kid. Even after it had been set and put in a little brace, it had ached deeper than any pain he'd gotten before.

This was like that. Only there was no bone to mend. The only thing that would heal it was time. Time, and abstaining from using any magic that

required his hands for a while. Which effectively ruled out all the magic he knew.

Plus his hands hurt.

And he kind of needed his hands to ride Steve.

The next few days of this trip were going to suck.

The Arbalestier had joined them for the trip. James learned that his name was Grescia, and he knew Gixelle. Apparently Grescia's wife, a woman named Cera, was a member of Clan Drakrid. Apparently she'd even been at James's induction. Her drake had gotten "Clutched up" as Grescia called it during the party at the hot springs as a result. So Grescia was heading to the Hatch-lands like they were.

James found himself liking Grescia. The redheaded veteran, because that was what he reminded James of, was gruff. He only really spoke when he was adressed, and even then kept the speaking to a minimum. He was in his forties, or at least James guessed he was and he was heavily scarred, most prominently the one that started at his brow. But he was also quick to smile, and had no issue taking up any of the duties around camp.

In short, he reminded James of a few of the older NCO's from back home.

The two of them also talked a lot about their respective equipment.

It turned out that being an Arbalestier meant that Grescia was on the cutting edge of enchanted weapons and armor. His wife was an accomplished enchantment mage, and he was a blacksmith and bowyer. Together they'd made his weapons and armor, using the money they earned from their respective trades, as well as some scales from Cera's drake, to create everything Grescia had used in the fight against the Elemental.

He and James exchanged basic info on their weapons. James made sure to ask permission first. He couldn't give out any chemical composition info or material design info. But he could give the basics. In return, Grescia gave him info on all the different enchantments his gear had, also just the basics.

Veliry listened in on those conversations very intently.

\----------

>Good morning sir/maam.
>
>Trip going well.
>
>Helped save a village from a giant fire elemental. Basically a magical creature that represents mother nature's embodiment of fire.
>
>Got a bit crispy, but I'm okay.
>

>I may have accidentally caused the magical equivalent of a Gold Rush though.
>
>Obsidian is weird here.
>
>Will update with more info at next town.
>
>\-Acting Captain Choi

General Krick looked at the text message that had popped up on his phone with a mixture of confusion and exhaustion.

He was sitting in the dining room of the Pentagon. He'd only gotten here the night before and he was only just now getting his first cup of coffee for the day. That text was too much to unpack before he got caffeine in him.

He disliked the Pentagon. He'd toured the original Pentagon back when he was a high school student on a business trip, all those decades ago. This new one had been built in the crater of that old building after the Water War had ended.

It was bigger, almost twice the width of the original. It was also set deeper into the earth thanks to that crater, In all it was nearly twenty stories from top to bottom. And where once the central courtyard had been simple open space, it now housed numerous defense systems and landing pads.

The building was a lesson in Military Engineering, and also a warning to America's enemies. It said, "You can blow us up, but we'll just come back even stronger." to anyone who knew what had happened to the original.

But it was also so much more depressing in the new building. There was no art to the building. No soft edges or decorative structures, hardly even any space for decoration.

In short, the new pentagon was solely a military structure. There was no fat on it. Everything was either designed to aid in whatever missions were being carried out from within, or defend the place from attacks outside.

There weren't a lot of people in the military who still remembered what that old building had looked like. It had been so long ago.

He wished he'd gotten to serve in THAT pentagon.

"Another cup, sir?" One of the servers in the officer's mess asked, interrupting his early morning melancholy. He nodded politely as he snapped back to reality.

The server poured the steaming black coffee into his cup and he sipped it, wondering when he'd finished the previous cup.

He reread the text.

I don't know if this goes into today's briefing or not. He thought. *Probably best if it doesn't.*

He stood up, taking the coffee with him, and walked out of the dining room.

As he walked he looked at the notes on his tablet.

1. Transport system stable and controllable.

>\-Energy inefficient, but not excessively so.
>
>\-Exit location dependent upon entry location.
>
>2) Other world has numerous resources.
>
>\-Land
>
>\-Water
>
>\-Unknown mineral resources
>
>\-Completely alien ecosystem
>
>\-Magic (show videos of CPT Choi and Chief Vickers)
>
>3) Resident Government is Monarchy and is currently amiable.
>
>4) Vanishing Blight (show Choi's videos/images)
>
>\-Simple terms, no $5 science words. There are "Eyes Only" Folders available for that.
>
>5) Secondary entry point and base camp established.
>
>\-Local currency successfully replicated
>
>\-Operatives currently embedded in local comunity
>
>6) Communication network being established and expanded by Choi, Vickers, and additional operatives.
>
>7) Communication established at both entry points. Foreign language (spoken and written) successfully translated and being refined. Currently at "Operational" levels of accuracy.
>
>8) Tertiary transport locations being evaluated.

He dreaded the day ahead of him. He hated meetings and briefings. He hated rubbing elbows with the other stars and bars at the top of the food chain, and the suits that had the "real" power. He hated being stuck inside stuffy rooms deep underground with shitty coffee and no smoke breaks.

He hated this new "Pentagon".

But no amount of longing for the days of his youth and simple NCO status would change the fact that he, as a General, had to just tough it out and do all the bureaucracy bullshit.

He sighed as he walked. Sipped his coffee, only to find that he'd absently drained another cup without realizing it.

And he kept walking forward and down towards the briefing.

\----------

Vickers was doing well in life. His trip towards the capital had become much more enjoyable over the past few days.

His merchant employer had already managed to sell a good portion of his loot off at the last town, which had a merchant's guild branch at it. There they'd actually had the goods evaluated and had even found that one of the art pieces had been stolen from a local lord.

The local guards had had to question him about that. He'd explained that he'd gotten them from a band of bandits that he'd managed to neutralized, earning looks of surprise and awe from them. The merchant's story had matched up, and he'd also provided a description of where they'd been.

They also questioned him about the fact that some of his coins had been found to be counterfeit by the merchant's guild. That had caught him off guard. But he was a professional. He played it off by saying that most of the coins in his purse were part of the bandit loot. They accepted it easily, but did wonder how bandits had managed to forge coins, much less coins that had more gold in them than the real ones did.

He filed all of that away for his next report home.

A couple days later, and he'd been cleared. The lord whose painting had been stolen sent them a large sum of coins and a formal invite to his estate at their first convenience.

He filed that away as well. You never knew when a contact like that might be useful. Even if they were almost a hundred miles back the way he'd come and he wasn't planning on going that way again any time soon.

But the most satisfying improvement was with the griffin. Tom had made huge strides over the past weeks.

For starters, he'd filled out immensely. But more importantly he didn't need the cage anymore. Vickers only put him in there whenever they were sleeping at night, and Tom seemed more than happy to lie down in it. But in the day time Tom walked beside their small, three wagon caravan.

Or at least he had until two days prior.

Vickers had used some of his earnings to buy a harness and saddle for the griffin. It looked more or less like a horses saddle. It was just narrower, and there were clips on the front and back of the seat as well as on the front of the stirrups. The stable workers had shown him how he was supposed to clip into it. They were to keep him in the saddle whenever Tom was flying, to keep him from falling, or losing control whenever they went upside down or turned tightly.

Now he didn't have to ride on any of the horses whenever he took up the roaming position in their caravan.

Soon, he'd be flying. His destination felt closer than ever.

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News of the summoned hero's victory over the elemental spread far, and spread fast.

The fact that an elemental had manifested was news enough to be interesting in most bars and restaurants.

The fact that it had been defeated was impressive enough to earn songs from bards, and boasts from wannabe heroes trying to find their way into the bed of someone gullible. It was enough to become a question of interest among adventuring circles, mage academies, druidic enclaves, and many places besides. It was the work of a hero, either a very powerful mage, or an incredible warrior, maybe even both.

The fact that the Elemental HADN'T been sealed within a sealing gem. Was enough to spark arguments and disbelief among many academic circles. Defeating, TRULY defeating, an elemental was difficult. Defeating a fire elemental, even more so.

The fact that the defeat of the Elemental had somehow created a new deposit of Elemental Glass Stone.

Well, that was impossible.

The majority of people who heard that, dismissed it out of hand.

But not all of them.

People who were going to pass by the more or less destroyed hamlet, made detours to the extraction site. They weren't allowed into it. Soldiers had the crater cordoned off, and guards were posted around the clock.

But the crater was too large to cover, and the now solid Elemental was hard to miss. So were the armored and guarded wagons being escorted out each day.

It didn't help that the local mage academies had been secretly asked to evaluate the properties of a new source of Elemental Glass Stone that had been found. There weren't many of those involved in the evaluation that let it slip. But there were always some.

Most people dismissed the rumors as impossible. But the people who knew how to connect things, saw the truth.

Among various circles, interest in this new Hero grew.

The Agency was foremost amongst them.

It had been THEIR elemental, not that anyone outside of their organization would ever know that. It had been a test of this new threat to their operations.

If he had run away, that would have told them something useful.

If he'd stayed to fight, it would have told them something else useful, after all he'd been traveling with an Arch Mage. Sealing an elemental should have been more than doable for them.

If he'd died, regardless of which choice he'd made, it would have told them something significantly less useful. But it also would have removed him from the equation. That would have been fine too.

The fact that he stayed and fought was a bad addition to their calculations.

The fact that he'd survived and defeated the elemental was also a bad addition, though expected as a result of the previous part.

The fact that he'd done so WITHOUT sealing the elemental, was not only a bad addition to their calculations. But even worse, it was completely unexpected.

The fact that he'd done so by turning it into Elemental Glass Stone?

Well, that was a problem.

The note left in the message room was read with growing concern by each member who entered and left. New notes were left. More than a few of them suggested elimination.

This new Summoned Hero was going to be a bigger issue than any of them had expected.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/te6a4e/wait_is_this_just_gate_102/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (100/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/taf9iw/wait_is_this_just_gate_99/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note:

CHAPTER OOOOOONNNNNNEEEEEEE HUNDREEEEDDDDDDDD!!!!!! [air horn noises]

Seriously though. It's been great so far guys. I've really enjoyed writing this. And I look forward to continuing. Next chapter is gonna be catching back up with the other people of the world(s), don't worry. Or do. This is a note, not a cop. It can't make you do shit.

Here's to another hundred.

............*Oh god, why would I say that? D:*

Enjoy.

\~

James, it seemed, had a habit of waking up in this world's equivalent of hospital beds.

As he drifted back to consciousness he had a vague sense of the dream he'd been having. There had been someone there. He thought it might have been him, like a clone of himself, only not quite. They'd told him something. Something good, he thought.

But the dream faded quickly, as his real world pains took over the front of his mind.

OOOOOOHhhheverythinghurts! He thought to himself as he sat up.

His shoulder hurt, and he had bandages on the right side of his face and his right arm.

"Oh god!" He grunted as he lifted himself up, only to fall back down immediately when his hands touched the bed. They were wrapped in bandages too. "Aaaw man, I look like a mummy."

"I don't know what a mummy is." Said a familiar, yet raspy and hoarse, voice, making him jolt. "But if bandages are the requirement, then I think I fit the description."

James looked to his left and saw parts of a familiar face. There was no head of red curls on top, but he recognized her well enough. Veliry sat in a stuffy chair to his left. Sure enough, she was wrapped almost head to toe in bandages.

"Vel?" He asked. "You're alive." He said with a soft smile as he slowly worked his way to sitting up.

"Unfortunately." She said with a chuckle, then she winced.

"I was worried that thing had gotten you." He said.

"Oh, it did." She assured him as she shifted a little. "But I've had worse." She winced as her elbow rubbed against the chair a bit. "Well, maybe not worse. But I've been hit pretty badly before."

"Did we win?" He asked her. "Did the crossbow guy shoot the gem thing at it?" He looked around, noticing a young man in dirty green healers robes snoring on a small couch nearby.

"You won." She said calmly. "But he didn't have to use the sealing gem."

"What?" James asked, confused. "What happened to the elemental?"

"Well." She began. "That's actually what I wanted to ask you about." She reached over to the small table next to her and picked up a large piece of shiny black rock. It had bits of dirt and something else sticking to it.

She stood up slowly, wobbling a little bit as she did, and walked the two steps over to the bed and held it out to him. James gingerly reached out and took a hold of it. He had to cup it in both of his hands to keep them from hurting too much.

"James. Do you know what that is?" She asked."Do your people have a name for it?"

He looked at the stone carefully. Of course he knew what it was. There wasn't a high school graduate in America who wouldn't recognize it.

"Yeah." He said. "It's just obsidian. Why?"

She nodded gently as she brought her hand up to her chin.

"Obsidian?" She said curiously. "That's a nice sounding word. We call it glass rock normally, but this is a special kind."

"Normally?" He wondered.

"Hold it up to the light." She said simply.

James braced it between both hands, ignoring the dull throb from under the glowing green bandages, and then held it up so that the lantern nearby was behind it.

"Woah." He said softly before bringing it closer to his face.

Inside of the rock was a swirling red pattern that looked like it might have been liquid. But when James shook it gently the swirling didn't change at all. He moved it out of the light and the pattern disappeared. The rock went back to being plain old obsidian.

"What the hell is this?" He asked.

"I'll tell you." She said. "But James, I need to know what you did to the Elemental."

"What do you mean?" He asked, now suddenly worried at the almost interrogation-like sound of her request.

She held out her hand. He was a bout to give the rock back when she spoke. "Give me your arm. It's easier to show you."

James placed the rock beside himself and held his arm out. She grabbed his arm below the wrist, avoiding the bandaging on his hands. It was as she grabbed his wrist that he realized that, even though it wasn't bandaged, he was badly sunburned.

"Ow." He said. "Ow ow ow ow.

"Quit whining." She said simply. "In case you haven't noticed, I got burned worse than you did."

He couldn't deny that.

Once he was up, with her help, they began walking out of the room they were in.

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"What the fuck is that?" James asked.

They were standing at the edge of the crater where James last remembered falling.

"That." Veliry replied. "Is all that's left of the Elemental."

Thirty feet or so away, and almost tall enough to reach out of the hole of the crater, was the largest piece of abstract art James had ever seen. Or at least his brain quantified it as a piece of abstract art.

It looked like it was made of obsidian, but not quite. For starters it was bright red. But it wasn't glass. The angles were all wrong. And it had arms and a head. Though, like his brain had thought, they were abstract.

It looked like someone had made a glass sculpture of the Elemental, then shattered it and melted it back together. Then they'd done it again a few more times for good measure.

There was also a half sphere-like formation around it, James was reminded of a chocolate ring that had been around his desert at a restaurant one time. Only instead of chocolate, it was more of the obsidian, like what Veliry had shown him earlier. There were also pieces of it scattered all over the ground around the crater. They looked like little tear drops of black glass.

"That piece I showed you earlier was some of that." She said, pointing at the tear drops he'd just been looking at. "It was actually burned onto your arm. They..... had to remove it." She said.

"Guess that explains the bandages." He said, looking at his right arm.

"Yeah. You're lucky." She replied. "You dislocated your shoulder when you fell, but your arm ended up under your face. Otherwise they'd have been peeling it off of your cheek."

James reached up and touched his bandaged hand to his cheek.

She turned and faced him. Her face, what little he could see outside of the bandages, was stern.

"James. I have to ask again." She began. "What did you do to the Elemental?"

James swallowed. He gestured at the crater in front of him, only just now noticing that there were members of the Royal Army present and moving about in the crater, though their uniforms looked somewhat sloppier than he was used to.

"I don't know for sure." He said. "But I think I did that."

She let out a sigh. "Let me solve that mystery for you." She said. "You DID do that." Her bandaged hands raised up in a gesture of pleading. "What I need to know is; HOW?"

He looked at her, noticing Kela marshaling the soldiers about behind her on the far side of the crater.

"All I did was seal it in a hole." He said. "Didn't the others tell you? The mage and the Arbalest guy." He sounded angry, even though he didn't mean to. "Hell, didn't Artair? He was there at the end."

She held her hands up in a 'I'm not trying to start anything' gesture.

"They did." She agreed. "According to them, you tricked it into the hole, then you began casting wind magic. The mage said that you must have been mad since that would've made the fire worse. And she was right." She paced a bit, wincing as she raised her hand to her chin. "Then you yelled some strange word that they didn't know. And the Elemental's fire became worse. Way worse than simple wind should've made it." She said.

"Yeah." He replied. "I yelled-"

She cut him off. "Oxygen? Right?"

"Yeah?" He said. "I was trying to get the elemental hotter."

"And according to them you succeeded." She said.

"Yeah." He held his bandaged hands up for her to see. "It got really hot."

"They said your eyes were glowing bright blue."

"They were?" He asked.

"Yes. Although it doesn't surprise me that you didn't know. Spell luminescence isn't visible to the caster."

"Woah." He said. Then he grinned a little bit. "Cool."

She ignored this. "Then you had the other mage, the third year, seal the hole?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"Well." He began. "I needed to cut the Elemental off from it's air supply. I figured shutting it into a giant clay pot..... essentially..... would work pretty well."

"But then the hole it was in exploded?" She wondered. "And then almost immediately..... imploded?"

"......Yeeeeaaaahhhh...." He agreed with an awkward grin. "I meant to get OUTSIDE of the hole's radius before that happened. But I guess the elemental burned the oxygen up faster than I expected." He did some mental math real quick. "God, it must have cooled down really quickly after that. For the implosion to happen that fast. I expected at least a minute or so before that happened."

"So you knew it was going to do that?" She asked incredulously.

"Well... yeah. Or at least I knew it would do something like that." He said nonchalantly. "That's like.... Middle School science class type stuff. Suckin eggs into coke bottles and what not."

She shook her head in confusion. "What?"

"I'll give you a demonstration later if you want." He said. "But all I did was create a vacuum."

"A what?" She asked.

His eyebrows furrowed as his head tilted a bit, surprised that the mage didn't know what a vacuum was.

"A.... space of negative pressure?" He said, not sure if that was the accurate description. But he thought it was.

"And what did 'Oxygen' have to do with this?" She asked.

"Well. Fire can't exist without it." He said. "Or at least normal fire can't. I wasn't sure if that'd apply to a giant magic fire monster." He nodded. "Bit of a gamble honestly."

She seemed to think for a moment before simply saying. "Huh." As she stared at the new elemental sculpture.

He didn't want to intrude on her thinking. But he kind of had to.

"So...." He started. "What IS that now?"

She didn't look at him. She simply pulled the red gem out of the pocket of the robe she was wearing. It was the same one she'd given him before the fight, the one he'd given the Arbalestier to shoot at the Elemental.

"That, James...." She paused as she turned to look at him. "Is the first NEW source of Elemental Glass Rock that has been found in.... at least three thousand years."

"What?" He asked, confused. "What do you mean?"

"That formation you see down there?" She pointed at the Elemental, then at the gem in his hand. "Is the same stuff we use to make sealing gems like that one." She paused. "That and," She waved at all the black obsidian on the ground. "all that. Are also what we use to make magical items." She held up a hand and began counting off on her bandaged fingers. "Magical weapons, magical armor, enchantment runes, spell scrolls," She lifted her robe a bit and showed him her feet. To his surprise, there were glowing feathers tattooed all over the still raw skin there. "Magical ink. It's how we enchant our currency so that forgeries can be detected by our treasury offices." She paced behind him, hands in the air. "We use it for all kinds of things magic related."

Then she grabbed his arm and pulled him closer to the edge.

"We've been using veins of this stuff that have existed longer than most of the kingdoms on this world." She said, gesturing to the crater. "There are no NEW sources." She pushed him closer to the edge, facing the Elemental. "Or at least there weren't until yesterday."

"So what?" He asked. "I just MADE a new vein of it?"

"That's what I'm saying James." She said as he turned around. "We don't know how to make that stuff. We didn't know that it WAS made." She gestured at the crater with both arms. "This explains SOO MANY things. And also raises a ton of new questions." She put her hand to her chin again. "This might be how the War of the Four winds ended."

And just like that Veliry was in her own world, and rattling off ideas like she had numerous times before.

James looked over to where he'd seen Kela and saw the Werewolf Captain looking at the two of them curiously. So he began walking towards her. She took his lead and began walking towards him too.

Thank god. He thought. *Everything hurts.*

He kept his right arm close to him, the thumb of that hand tucked lightly into the hem of his pants. The shoulder throbbed anyways, and the thumb smarted from the burns underneath the bandages.

His legs seemed fine enough, but the fronts of them had that same sunburn sensation that the rest of his body seemed to have. He wondered just a little about whether or not he had eyebrows. But he decided that he didn't need to risk that level of traumatization.

Kela met him before he even made it to the halfway point. He peaked behind him and saw Veliry walking back toward the building, a house, that they'd left. She was still muttering to herself, completely engrossed in her own thoughts.

"That was..... informative?" He said as Kela approached.

To his surprise, she hugged him. This time she was gentle about it.

"I was confused when I heard Artair's voice." She said as she took him by his shoulders. "Then when I heard what he was yelling I thought you were already dead." She looked him over. "It only got worse when I saw where he was yelling into." She gestured at the crater.

"Yeah." He said tentatively. "Not gonna lie. When I fell I thought, 'Well this is pretty much it' for just a second." He pointed to the Elemental. "What're y'all doin in there?" He asked.

She looked, confused at his dismissive attitude. "Didn't she tell you? That's Elemental Glass Stone. One of the most sought after materials out there." She pointed at some of the soldiers moving in and out of the crater. James noticed that they had buckets and a bunch of different tools. "We're harvesting it."

That made sense to James. "Where'd those guys come from? I didn't think there was an actual TOWN for another day or so?" He wondered.

"That's true." She admitted. "They're mainly part of that garrison too. Though a couple of them are from the last town we were at. This is just where their families live. They took care of their families and what's left of the hamlet during and after the attack. Then I called them into service for this."

"You're interrupting their leave?" James asked, a little upset at the idea.

"Only for another day." She assured him. "Don't worry, I'll see to it that their commanders make it up to them. But the 'on duty' soldiers will be here the day after tomorrow."

"That's good." He said as he sat down, legs sticking over the edge of the crater. "So we've only been here an extra day?"

"Yes." She answered. "Luckily the town's healing apprentice is actually quite skilled. Apparently he's only waiting for the towns actual healer to retire before he becomes official."

"That's nice." James said. "That's.... that's good."

He laid back, resting his head against the (thankfully cool) ground. Kela looked at him curiously.

"That's all good." He said as he placed his left arm under his head. "Being burned is exhausting." As he closed his eyes he added. "Don't tell Amina I almost died again."

He was sleeping before she could say anything in response.

"Idiot." She said softly. Then she sat down next to him.

Her tail wagged a bit before she got it back under control.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (99/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/t9q0y0/wait_is_this_just_gate_98/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Things go really well, until they don't.

Enjoy

\~

James ran towards the hole, ears ringing high E the entire way. Behind him the Arbalestier and the Mage were slowly coming back to their senses. There was a moment of confusion as they both noticed Artair riding atop Xhalya.

James didn't hear Artair yell, ^("Where the hell are you going? We need to get out of here!")

The elemental was roaring. James COULD hear that. The hole was crumbled a bit around the edges, and the elemental was blasting flames out of it like a fiery version of a geyser. He could feel the impacts of its attacks under his feet as he approached.

"Ooooh someone's maaaaad." He said to himself as he ran up. But even his own voice was muffled.

When he got to the hole he cautiously peered around the edge. Then he jumped back as a massive jet of flame blasted out.

Deep inside, about twenty feet below him, the elemental was raging. It slammed its fists into the walls of the earthen prison, and shouldered against it, occasionally bellowing fire out of its mouth and roaring constantly.

James began drawing in energy and began focusing in his mind. He needed to repeat the little trick he'd shown Veliry nearly a week before. He did simple chemistry in his head, focusing the thoughts on the energy running down his arms as his clothes began to flutter around him. He was vaguely aware of someone, several someones in fact, running up beside him. The Arbalestier and the Mage had joined him.

He felt someone tug at his shoulder. He kept doing the mental exercise as he drew in more energy.

"What?" He asked as he opened his eyes.

^("Why are you casting wind magic?") It was the mage, he could barely hear her over the ringing. ^("You can't use that on a fire elemental.")

"I know!" He yelled without meaning to. "Just trust me! Also, do you know earth magic?"

Her eyebrows drew together in confusion before she nodded her head. She was about to talk when James cut her off.

"Good!" He said. "Get ready to close the hole!" He looked over at the Arbalestier nearby. "Ready?" He yelled.

The Arbalestier gave him a confused nod as he pulled a small hand crossbow from his belt. He began fiddling with it but James went back to focusing. As he did he began feeling the energy pull away a bit, telling him that the mage was casting too.

He couldn't tell if his hands were getting hot from all the energy build up or from the Elementals jets of fire. Probably both, he realized. Either way, things were about to get hotter.

"BE READY TO RUN!" He yelled over his shoulder.

Oxygen, Oxygen, OXYGEN, OXYGENOXYGENOXYGEN!

"OXYGEN!!!!"

He thought, and then yelled, as he released the spell into the opening of the hole.

He felt the puff of air that wind magic always started as. Then he felt the backwards push, or recoil as he'd come to think of it, as he emitted a stream of what he hoped was the concentrated O2 that he'd been trying to create.

The effect was hard to miss.

Where before the hole he'd dug out had been a glowing hole that had looked like it had a camp fire set deep in it. Now it became a brilliant orange column of pure light and heat. A massive column of flame began rising out of it, nearly as tall as the elemental had been when it had been up on top of the ground. For a second, James had actually thought it had escaped.

But this column didn't have arms to swing at them. It didn't have a face to glare at him as he ineffectively shot at it. And while there was a breath of fire, it was launching up in a solid vertical pillar, and not aiming at them or sweeping the area.

The crackling roar had been devoured by a deafening noise that had reminded James of the time he'd seen an A-10 warthog fly over at an air show.

To say that the heat was intense was an understatement. He could see the other two next to him shrinking back as he continued casting. He felt the mage's concentration slip, he accidentally drew in some of the energy she lost as she did, the flames momentarily intensifying.

Don't stop. He thought. *Keep going. Keep drawing in and shooting out. DON'T STOP! HOTTER!*

He ignored the fact that his sleeves were smoking.

He ignored the pain in his palms and fingers.

He DIDN'T ignore the fact that the edge of the hole was starting to get wider, crumbling little by little.

He couldn't see it, but his eyes were glowing a bright, light, blue.

He looked back at the Mage and Arbalestier. They were both leaning away from the hole. He looked directly at the mage and saw the fear in her face.

"Get ready." He said calmly. She saw his face, and seemed to understand. She stood back up and he felt her drawing in the energy around her. She did something smart and he felt the area directly around them cool marginally.

Energy from the heat itself? He thought curiously. *Smart*. *I wonder if I can use that to create a self fueling spell?*

So that's what he did too. The area around him got even cooler, even as his hands kept getting hotter. His eyes glowed even brighter. But the important thing was that the flames got hotter too.

Then he saw one of the Elemental's hands reach out of the hole. It had grown bigger. He'd kind of expected that.

The hand grabbed at the edge of the hole.

The dirt there baked dry instantly and then seemed to fuse. James wondered just how hot the damn thing had actually gotten that it could make glass out of dirt. Then the earth around the hand hold crumbled and the hand slipped back in.

James cut off the spell, and focused instead on helping the mage with the earth magic. But instead he fell to a knee. When his hand braced against the ground it screamed in pain, a flare of agony slamming into James's mind.

He'd definitely burned his hands.

"NOW!" He yelled as he looked at the mage, clutching his hand to his chest.

She didn't nod. She just clapped her hands together, as if trying to catch a fly between them. James looked back just in time to see the hole slam shut. The heat in the air seemed to disappear, though he was guessing that it had simply lessened.

He pivoted on his feet, ignoring the pain in his hands as he pushed off, and began running towards her. He needed to get her out of the radius of the hole's conical footprint. He'd just have to trust that the Arbalestier could handle himself.

The ground seemed to well up beneath him for just a moment, raising him maybe half a foot. He saw the mage rise up too, toppling over backwards as she did. The Arbalestier used the motion to begin a dive away from the hole, small crossbow still in his hand.

But James was too weak, and felt himself driven to his knees by the upheaval.

Then he became weightless for just a fraction of a second.

He thought he heard a loud "WHUMPF!" sound. But he wasn't sure. His ears were still ringing.

Then he was falling. He saw the Arbalestier just barely getting past the edge. He saw Artair and Xhalya behind him rear back. He saw the mage clinging to the edge by one hand.

He saw all of this in a brief snapshot.

Then it all rushed skyward in a blur before he could do anything about it.

\----------

Kela was on her third water run. The dwarf who owned the house that the cellar was under only had two pails for water. One was being used as a makeshift pot to warm the water that Tamla was having Gixelle soak the towels in. So Kela only had one to use.

She still didn't understand the idea of Veliry being cold despite the fact that she'd been burned. But she had to admit that the healer, even as an apprentice, probably knew more than her. And Gixelle had assured her that it was true, and Gixelle had seen a great number of people suffer burns from dragon-kin attacks. She would know. So Kela simply trusted them.

Plus the water runs allowed her to get an eye on the battle, and kept her from strangling the dwarf, who had been pestering them the entire time.

She was only just finishing up with filling the pail when there was a loud roar, like the one the Elemental had let out previously, but so much louder, and sustained.

As she rounded the corner of the house she realized that she couldn't see the Elemental. She jogged around the other corner, looking for it. It was gone.

Did they do it? She wondered as she turned back towards the cellar doors.

Then there was a loud noise. It was like a pop, but deeper and somehow.....lower? She looked around, scanning the buildings to see if maybe one of them had collapsed. But they were all in the state they had been.

Then she heard something unexpected. Someone yelling? Why did they sound familiar.

"Artair?" She asked the air.

He was yelling. And as her ears angled to catch the sound better her heart dropped.

She dropped the pail of water to the ground, ignoring it as it splashed against her.

And she began running.

Again.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (98/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/t8y0lc/wait_is_this_just_gate_97/) /
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Writer's note: \[Lights cigar\] I love it when a plan comes together.

Enjoy.

\~

James took a moment to relax. It was cool down here, the flames of the elemental hadn't baked the moisture out this far down. It was nice, and he couldn't help but take a five second breather between his spells. When he stood back up he looked around.

He thought this might have been wide enough now, and it was definitely deep enough. He had to guess that it was damn near sixty feet deep now, if not seventy, and he'd widened it out to almost fifty, though he'd made sure that it narrowed at the top, it still sloped outward at one section, he needed that to get out. But other than that it was mostly sloped down and out, in a sort of cone shape, wider at the bottom. He used the slope to climb out, struggling more than he really wanted to, but after about a minute he managed to scramble over the edge. After he did he stood up and cast the spell again, but this time it was just to get the edge evened out so that the top was even with the rest of the cone shape.

He was tired. The sensation of casting spells had gone from pleasantly empowering to exhaustingly draining. His arms, and especially his hands, were burning as if he'd spent all day lifting weights. It reminded him of some of his training days when he and his fellow soldiers had had competitions to see who could loosen the nuts on a wheel by hand the fastest. He'd won a couple of those competitions, but his forearms and hands had paid the price and he'd been crab clawed afterwords.

But he had work to do.

As he stood up, dusting the mud off of his pants absently, he heard someone slam into the ground nearby. When he looked he saw the Arbalestier taking a knee as he reloaded his massive multi-crossbow. He was reeling in a chain that ended in a massive spiked weight, it looked like one of those Japanese war-clubs.

He looked at the elemental and saw the young mage harassing it with some long range spells as she ran from cover to cover. The elemental was clawing at some black spots on its face and chest.

"I thought you'd run away." The man said as he stood up. "I was a little mad after that show you made of joining us."

"Sorry." James said. "But I've got a plan."

"Yes, I saw." The armored gunner said as he walked up to the edge of the hole. Upon seeing the outward angle he slowed a little bit and craned his head over the side. "Looks like you're almost at the well level." He said after a moment. "There's a small bit of water pooling. That's good." He turned to James. "I take it we lure it to this." He said, pointing at the hole.

"That's the idea." James replied. Then he held up the red gem that Veliry had given him. "Then I just have to hit it with this."

"Sealing gem." The man said after looking at it. "I can shoot that at it if you want."

"Really?" James asked.

"Yes. But the elemental needs to be weakened first." He replied calmly. "It'll need to be in the hole, then you and the other mage can work on hitting it with more ice and water." He thought. "Or just collapse the hole onto it."

"Pokemon style." James said, not noticing that the man tilted his head at the reference. "Got it."

"We'll need to trick it." The man said.

"Yeah I think I've got something for that." James said.

"I can make some smoke." The Arbalestier pulled three paper wrapped tubes out of one of his pouches as he said this.

James reached into the bottomless bag at his hip, the one where he kept his non lethal army equipment that he might need, and pulled out a metal canister with a ring and metal handle on the side of it. There was a red ring of paint around the bottom.

"Me too." He said. Though, he didn't mention that he only had the ONE smoke device.

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"This is a good sign." Tamla assured them as he continued bathing Veliry's skin in the amber light of healing. Beneath his hands the skin was slowly fading back to its normal, lightly tanned, color. It still looked raw, but it didn't look burned anymore. "It means that the shield kept her out of direct contact with the elemental's fire." He paused a moment as he concentrated. "She should be able to recover. It's just going to take time."

"Good." Gixelle said.

Veliry was shrouded in towels that had been soaked in warm water. Tamla was removing them as he moved from one section of burned skin to the next. Even with the warm water on her, Veliry was shivering on the table.

"That's the real threat." Tamla said. "Get more water, heat it up, we'll need to keep her warm."

"She just got burned." Kela said. "She's plenty warm."

"No." Tamla said simply. "She's the opposite, the burns have her body confused. It doesn't know how to maintain its temperature right now. We need to keep her warm."

That didn't make sense to Kela. But Gixelle began moving before she could say any more. Kela joined her.

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James watched, kneeling as the smoke grenade released its thick red smoke. He and the Arbalestier had positioned them up wind a few yards from where the hole was, and the whole area was beginning to fill with a mixture of red and grey haze.

James used the time to double check his rifle.

Mag full.... round chambered. He thought as he went through the motions. Up ahead the Arbalestier and the mage were slowly drawing the Elemental his way. *Caps off scope.* He just had to play the bait. *Safety off..... Spares on the belt.*

The wait was killing him. He raised the rifle up, resting his cheek on the stock and looking down length through the in line scope on top. The little red X mark in the middle was nice and bright from all the light being filtered in through the fiber optic cable running down the side and top. He moved the little X over the face of the Elemental and began tracking it, left eye squinted shut so he could focus.

After a few seconds he opened both eyes and began casually tracking the movements of the other two, while still keeping his focus on keeping the sight centered on the monster's face.

The mage was running, and as he watched he realized that she was running much faster than he thought. He looked directly at her for a second and realized that her legs were a blur of motion as she ran.

It's like someone taught the Flash how to cast spells. He thought. Though, she wasn't moving anywhere near the speed of sound. *I'm gonna have to ask Vel to teach me that.* The thought brought him back to the task at hand. *If she survives.*

He sighted the monster again.

It was slowly but surely getting closer.

He knew now that whatever that "Club on a chain" thing was that the Arbalestier had been reeling in when he'd spoke to him, was actually how he was flying around like a maniac. The man would load it into the bottom slot on his quadruple crossbow, and then fire it into the air at a high angle, similar to how James might have fired a grenade launcher if he had one. The club section would flare with magical light for a second as it flew. Then when it hit the end of its chain the man's armor would also flare with a dull yellow light, and he would begin flying after it.

In practice, it looked like something that might happen to Wile E. Coyote when one of his contraptions (Courtesy of ACME) would backfire and end up launching him in the air. James's brain struggled to negotiate with the obvious breaking of the laws of physics that was involved. But in the end

he just relegated it to "Magical Shenanigans" in his mind, and ignored it.

He'd have to ask about that too.

The growing heat of the approaching monster snapped him out of his thoughts. He looked back down his sights and saw that the thing was only about a hundred yards away now.

"ON ME!" He yelled, letting the other two know that now was the time. The Arbalestier had told the mage the plan while they'd been running around. James didn't know how he'd found time to do that. But that was just another question for later.

Both of them began moving toward his position as he stood up.

His left hand left the rifle for just a moment as he cast a spell. When he released it a blast of air cleared the smoke for about ten feet around him. Then his hand shot back to the rifle and braced it.

In his sights the creature turned and watched the two attackers moving away. James realized for the first time that it had two small red patches that glowed differently from the rest of its "face" that must have been its eyes. He aimed at one of them as it tracked them for a moment.

Then it seemed to notice James. He saw it look at him through the sight. He had a thought to run. But then he remembered that it seeing him was the plan.

"Ohhhhh." He said while exhaling slowly. "That's fuckin terrifying."

Then he squeezed the trigger.

BANG!

He saw, out of the corner of his eye, the Mage jump a little at the sound of the weapons report. He didn't see the Arbalestier's head snap to look at him in shock.

Then in his sights he saw the Elemental's head Jerk for just a second. Its "hand" slapped to its face, making a somewhat comical parody of what a person would do if they had just been hit in the eye. Then after just a moment its hand fell away from its face and it seemed to look at it in confusion.

James watched all this through his sight.

He'd clearly hit the thing. It's head had felt the impact, and its hand told him that it had even hit it in it's massive eye spot. But when it turned up to look back it him, he saw that the eye was undamaged.

It was still the same shape.

It still glowed the same "off-orange" that it had before.

And the monster wasn't roaring that crackling rumble that it seemed to do when it was in pain.

His bullet, large and fast and accurate as it had been, had done little more than confuse the massive animated fire storm.

"Well." James said as he began slowly backing up. "Shit."

He flipped a switch on the side of his weapon and sighted the things face again as the Arbalestier finally caught up to him. The Mage was only a few yards away too. They both practically dove out of the way when he pulled the trigger again.

BA-BA-BANG!

The creature's head snapped back again, as James watched several small splashes of what looked like lava pop off of its flesh. But this time it didn't bring its hand up to its face. It simply looked at him angrily.

"What in the hells is that thing?!" The Arbalestier asked in confusion as he warily jogged past James and took position next to him, reloading his weapon as he did.

"Long story." James said as he aimed at the thing's neck instead. He was still slowly back pedaling as the monster advanced.

BA-BA-BANG!

"I'll tell you later..... maybe." He said as the mage finally joined them. "What I can tell you right now; is that it's having about as much of an effect on that thing as I'd expected."

BA-BA-BANG!

"Which is fuck all." James finished. The beast lumbered forward, picking up speed.

"At least it's working." Said the young mage. "It's coming right for us."

BA-BA-BANG!

"God's that's bloody loud!" She said. "My ears are ringing!"

James knew what she meant. In all his planning, he'd forgotten to put his ear plugs in either of the bottomless bags. They were currently sitting in his uniform Jacket pocket, back in Steve's saddlebag. Wherever that was right now.

"Sorry!" He said, yelling to get over the ringing in his own ears.

A bolt flew out towards the Elemental's base, a paper wrapped tube attached to it. Then two blue-glowing bolts flew for the thing's face.

The first one hit the ground in front of the elemental, somewhere in all the smoke where they couldn't see it. It quickly caught fire and began spewing its own smoke, adding to the obscuring effect of the area. Then the two blue bolts hit the creature just below its eyes, making it roar again.

They used the momentary pause to gain more space before the Elemental began moving again.

But it was getting hard to see. They were getting a bit too far into their own smoke screen, the red and grey haze swirling around them.

"Can you clear this a bit?" James asked the mage.

She looked at him curiously, then he noticed that she had her hands over her ears. He faced her directly, rifle aimed at the ground as his right hand waved at the air around them.

"CAN YOU CLEAR THIS A BIT!" He yelled.

She nodded as she heard what he said and got the message. He turned back and fired again, causing her to flinch.

MILITARY..... GRADE.... TINNITUS! He thought grimly.

BA-BA-BANG!

>!"Fucking drake's cocks!"!< James heard the Arbalestier's curse something. But he couldn't hear what over the ringing. The man had thrown his helmet off and to the side, and had his head pressed against his left shoulder to shield the ear on that side as he reloaded his weapon. He had long red hair with streaks of blond in it. There was a large scar running down the side of his head from the eyebrow all the way back past his ear. When he was done reloading he turned to James, an armored hand over his left ear. >!"Quit fuckin firing that thing if it isn't gonna do anything to it!"!< He saw the redhead yell at him. Then the man turned back and shouldered his weapon to fire at the thing.

James couldn't hear him over the opera singer in his ears. But he got the message.

He flipped the safety on and then let the weapon hang at his side, under his right arm.

When he looked up the elemental was closer, even though they'd been back pedaling the whole time.

He also saw it's head rearing back.

He knew that move.

Steve had done that move plenty of times.

And he'd seen the elemental do it just before it had brought down Veliry.

His eyes went wide, and he felt himself drawing energy into his arms and hands again. Oddly, he could feel the energy also flowing into the mage next to him and he was reminded of how he'd felt that same pulling flow any time Veliry had been casting spells near him.

But he didn't have time to think of that. He drew everything he could into himself.

He felt his heart rate spike and his head begin to throb as he even drew his own energy into the spell.

GOTTA GO BIG THIS TIME! He thought.

He saw a blue shimmer appear in front of his eyes, as though a blue sheet of glass had risen suddenly. His hands clenched into fists and he brought them up in front of him as though doing a double handed upper cut.

A wall of solid earth shot up in front of them, and on the other side of the blue shimmer.

Then the world erupted into fire.

To James's surprise, instead of feeling himself being melted down into Choi soup, James felt himself being impacted by something. He was vaguely reminded of a time he'd played football with his battle buddies and had been laid out flat by one of their eleven bravo buddies.

It took a second for him to come back to his senses. He'd closed his eyes when the fire had hit. And the impact had stunned and winded him. But when he looked, all three of them were lying on the ground in a pile of bodies and discarded weaponry.

He heard the loud crackling roar of the Elemental's rage, though it sounded muffled somehow. Maybe by his now impaired hearing. But that didn't seem quite right.

Then James heard someone talking from far away beyond wherever the siren was going off in his ears.

^("If only I had the time to savor getting to have Xhalya knock you on your ass.") They said.

And when James looked he saw someone that he'd never thought he would be happy to see.

He hated to admit it, but Prince Artair had just saved his ass.

^("Get up HERO!") The prince said, still incredibly muffled. ^("Your plan worked. But there's still work to be done.")

James looked around for a second and realized that the Elemental was nowhere in sight.

It fuckin worked. He thought as he grinned and shot to his feet.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (97/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/t6q2fu/wait_is_this_just_gate_96/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: Kela goes mama-wolf on a fool. James has a plan. And there's some more info on the Arbalestier. That's all I got for you.

Enjoy.

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The door to the cellar opened so violently that Kamir thought it had been ripped off its hinges. Everyone in the room jumped, or flinched, or cried out in fear. The all had the same thought in their heads. That this was it, the elemental had finally come for them. He wrapped his arms around his family, hoping to buy them time, or at least die while holding them.

Then the gigantic warrior from earlier came rushing in, with a large werewolf behind her. In the woman's arms was the body of someone small, wrapped in a water and mud soaked blanket.

"Please!" The wolf yelled out. "Is anyone here a healer?"

The warrior jogged over to one of the tables that Kamir had placed some of the family's clothes on and brushed them all off before placing the bundled person on top of it.

"Oy!" He yelled as he got up to confront them. "What're you doin?"

"She's hurt very badly." The woman said as she glared at Kamir, daring him to say anything.

"We need a healer." The wolf repeated.

The woman, Kamir could see now that it was a small woman in the blanket, moaned in pain as the blanket was unraveled a bit. The flesh Kamir saw underneath was red and black with scorch marks. There didn't seem to be an inch of the young girl that was untouched by the fire.

"You can't keep bringin' people here." Kamir said, not knowing what else he COULD say. "We're already full up."

"That's not important." The warrior said. "Besides, we're not bringing anyone else. The fight's over."

"I'm a healer." Said a young boy. Kamir looked and saw Tamla, the young healer's apprentice from town, approaching.

"You're an apprentice." Kamir countered.

"I am." He replied.

"It's good enough." The wolf assured him. "Please. She's hurt very badly." She said as she motioned for the young man to come over. Tamla did and began inspecting the burned woman.

"We can't be havin' more people here." Kamir said. But they ignored him.

"How'd she get burned?" Tamla asked as his hands began to glow a dull amber. "Was it the elemental?"

"Yes." The warrior woman answered. "She was fighting it. It got her during her last attack."

"That was her?" Tamla asked incredulously. "Had she managed to shield herself? Those burns won't heal if she wasn't shielded."

"She was." The warrior replied. "But only barely, and it didn't last."

"That's not good." Tamla said, more to himself than to them. "I'll do what I can."

"What can we do to help?" The wolf asked.

"Mister Kamir, we need some water from your well." Tamla said, less a request and more an order.

Kamir began moving before he came to his senses.

"No." He said turning around to face them again. "No, you need to get out of here. We can't be having all these people here. It's goin to hear us." He said angrily.

Suddenly the werewolf was standing directly in front of him. She towered over his dwarven frame, easily three feet taller than he was. It was only now, as she stood glaring at him with her teeth bared, that he realized that her armor had the marks of a Captain of the guard. He quailed.

"She can't move." The wolf captain said. "She only got hurt this bad because she was trying to save this village. She. Needs. Healing." She took a step forward, backing Kamir into one of his shelves. "And as a captain of the King's royal guard, I am duty bound to protect his Arch-Mage, and kill anyone who attempts to stop me from doing so." She said, her voice rumbling deeply, as if growling the words out.

He could see the anger and, he thought, fear in her eyes.

Then a hand appeared on the wolf's shoulder and pulled gently.

"Later Kel." The large warrior said calmly from behind her. "Let's tend to Veliry."

"Get. Water." The wolf said before turning around.

Kamir gulped. Then he ran out of the cellar to fetch water from the well pump outside.

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James was sweating as he jogged from cover to cover. The Elemental was fighting again, the young mage and the Arbalestier harassing it at every chance. But it wasn't quite as big as before. He thought that might have been a lingering effect of Veliry's attack, or maybe because the area around it was positively soaked. But he wasn't sure, and he wasn't exactly capable of asking anyone.

The mud was making it hard to move. The fact that it had been bake-dried before Veliry's attack, and then soaked and mixed with ash had made it into a gooey, sticky slurry of dark brown that sucked at his boots and slowed him down. It made him glad that he'd worn his Army boots today. Not too many occasions where that was the case.

On the upside of all the muck; was the fact that the heat from the elemental was causing the water and mud on the ground around it to evaporate very quickly. As a result, the current fighting was occurring in a cloud of rapidly growing steam. The Elemental was having a hard time seeing its two assailants, and the two of them were more freely able to move.

Regardless, he had a plan. Or at least he hoped he had a plan. He'd find out when it either worked, or he got turned into Kentucky Fried Choi.

He ran roughly a hundred and fifty yards away from the fight, out into what looked like it had once been a farming field. It was burned bare now, the elemental having passed through it at some point prior to now. But James was fairly certain that the field had once been full of wheat, or at least something wheat-like.

It was a large, open, relatively flat space that probably had nice soft soil. It also wasn't near any of the buildings, the closest of them being what looked like a farm house about two hundred yards away. Or at least it might have been a farm house before the Elemental had gotten to it.

James stopped in the middle of the ashy field and began focusing his energy into his arms. He felt the familiar surge of power that came with casting spells and he began forming the spell in his mind, his fingers flying through the motions Veliry had taught him.

For a split second, he wondered if she was going to be alright. Then he felt the energy slip a bit, and he focused again.

He couldn't see it, he'd closed his eyes to concentrate, but around him the light was warping and distorting. He felt his heart-rate spike for a moment, he sagged a bit.

Nope. He thought. *Focus. Don't draw from yourself. You're not ready for that. Draw it from everything else.*

His heart-rate settled again and he stood up a bit straighter. The air around him began to blow, like it had when he was casting wind magic. But that wasn't the plan, he was just drawing energy from the wind itself. The warping effect that was occurring, though he still couldn't see it, was because he was drawing energy from the light too. He could feel all of it flowing through him and into his hands.

I wonder if this is what the old Monks from Earth were talking about? The whole, becoming one with everything thing. He wondered.

He kept building up the energy. It felt amazing. But after a few minutes his hands were getting hot. Veliry had warned him of that. Until he got better at energy manipulation, and conditioned himself to handle more, he wouldn't be able to go much further than this.

Still. He thought. *I think this'll make a good start.*

James opened his eyes, and extended his arms outward, holding them together like countless anime power attacks he'd seen.

Then he released the spell.

There was a moment of lag before he saw anything occur. It was brief, maybe a heartbeat or two. Then the ground in front of his hands began to bubble, as though someone was boiling it somehow. He felt the ground beneath his feet vibrating, as if there was an earthquake, or maybe a large train rumbling past.

Then the ground in front of him seemed almost to run away from him. He had a vague sense of being in one of those dreams where you're running towards a door but the door keeps getting further and further away. That was how the space in front of him looked. He was standing still but it just.... retreated. And fast.

Where before there had been solid ground, now there was a massive hole. It wasn't as deep as he wanted. Or as wide as he'd wanted. And it was angled away from him, creating a bit of a slope. But it was a start.

"That's what?" He asked no one in particular. "Fifteen feet? Maybe twenty." He looked at the sides and did some estimates. "And about ten wide." He nodded. "Alright."

He walked around the edge of the hole, mentally aiming at a different part of the ground and at a different angle.

"Round two." He said before closing his eyes and beginning to focus again.

The air and light around him began to bend again.

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Grescia was doing everything he could to keep fighting.

But he'd already been fighting for hours BEFORE the arch-mage had crashed to the ground. And armor didn't get lighter the longer you wore it. Not even enchanted Drake-Mail like his.

And he was slowly but surely running out of the Mentium Bolts that were in his bottomless bag. Cera was going to kill him when she found out. Assuming he lived that long. The bolts had cost a fortune to source materials for, and she'd spent months slowly but surely enchanting them with the magics necessary for them to adapt to his needs. Each one would be worth at least twenty gold pieces, if not more.

Yes. Cera would be quite cross when she found out.

He brushed the thoughts from his mind as he landed on the scrap of a building that his body-pault carried him to. The heavy weighted, heavily enchanted, projectile returning to his hand rapidly as he reeled in the chain attached to it and then slotted it back into his quad-balest's lowest launcher.

He quickly aimed the weapon at the spot the Elemental was at, and then pulled back as he saw the mage running through the mist and launching spell attacks at the massive creature. He didn't want to hit the young woman. He wouldn't, he knew his aim was better than that, but he played it safe. Plus he was low on ammo.

Where's that young weird looking man? He wondered. *I thought he was joining us.*

He took a moment to look around. Then he heard the crackling roar of the elemental and realized that he needed to help the mage.

He raised the quad-balest to his shoulder, focusing his magical energy into the weapon. The energy channeled through the arcane runes and inks that were on the weapon's grips and flowed into the bolts he had slotted. He focused it into frost magic, much like the mage would for her spell attack, and saw the heads of the bolts glow a soft blue.

He aimed for the monster's face, if the writhing mass of flames could be called its face, and pressed two of the triggers, he paused for a split second adjusting his aim ever so slightly as he did, then depressed the third trigger.

The three bolts flew towards the elemental as it swung its left arm out to sweep at the retreating mage. The first two bolts struck it in the head and exploded in clouds of powdery hoarfrost that clung to the elemental, if only for a moment. The Elemental reeled as its body darkened around the projectiles. It roared and turned to face him, the

frost already evaporating into more of the steam. Then the third bolt struck it in the forehead, causing more of the frost.

Before the thing could recover and begin coming for him, he aimed the weapon up and away from him at a high angle and fired.

The body-pault went flying through the air, and a split second later he was being pulled by the harness it was attached to as the projectile's enchantments launched it forward and gave it more weight.

As he was flying he looked around.

It took a moment, the thick steam around the fight making it harder to see, but he spotted the odd young man a few hundred yards away from where he was about to land. The air around him was distorting and warping with magical energy flow.

What the hells is he doing? He thought.

Then he saw the young man jump into a hole that he hadn't noticed before.

Oh. He thought. *That's his plan.* He paused and thought for a moment. *That might work.*

\---

Alright. James thought, sweat beading on his forehead from both the heat, and the magical exertion of what he was doing. *Four holes down. I think that might be wide enough. Now the not so fun part.*

He stepped to the edge of the hole on one of the sloped edges. It was a bit more funnel shaped than what he wanted, but it was nearly fifty feet wide now, his last few casts being focused on width more than depth, and at its deepest it was nearly twenty feet down.

Before he could second guess himself he began sliding down the, surprisingly hard packed, side of the funnel.

"Ohhhhh I hope I can get back up that when I'm done." He said to himself.

He began casting again, the air and light around him fluctuating again.

"Now we just have to go deeper." He said. He paused for a moment, the spell slipping ever so slightly. Then he chuckled. "That's what she said." He said with a grin.

Then he went back to focusing on the spell.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (96/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/t64d98/wait_is_this_just_gate_95/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Frying pan, meet fire. Literally. Or, you know, as literally as written literature can get

Literaturely? Literalaturely? IDK. Yall get the idea.

Enjoy.

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Everyone else watched as the massive pillar of water crashed into the raging Elemental, dousing its flames and sending it slamming into the ground with the weight of the plummeting cascade.

James, on the other hand, watched as Veliry began to fall instead.

She began falling right as she brought the attack down. But he saw the flames still surround her, only briefly as the attack was interrupted. He saw the field of energy surround her, likely cast by the mage that had been assisting her, and then he saw the smoke trailing from her falling body anyways.

He began to sprint, and a split second later Gixelle followed.

\--

Had it worked? Veliry thought. *Had it been enough?*

She'd let off her levitation enchantment as soon as she'd finished the attack. Partly so that she could bring the water down with more force, but primarily so that she could try to dodge the incoming fire.

But she'd known that she'd started falling too late.

Now everything hurt. Not just from exertion, or overuse either, but from pain.

She'd seen the blue glimmer of an ice enhanced warding shield surround her for a brief second. It must have been from the third year down below. But it had been weak, and just a little too late. The flames had only been held at bay for a second, maybe two, before the shield had shattered.

The only reason she was still alive was because that had been enough to let her fall past the flame's spray. But the heat outside of the spray had still been enough to cook her.

Even if she had had the energy left, and she definitely didn't, the pain would have been too much for her to reengage her levitation. To top it

off, she didn't even know if she still had the skin on her feet anymore, much less the enchanted tattoos that allowed them to make her fly in the first place.

So she was falling.

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C'mon Vel! James thought as he ran. *Come on, FLY!*

But she wasn't. She was falling. And she wasn't doing it in style either. She was plummeting like a meteor.

And he wasn't anywhere near fast enough to catch her. He could only hope that there was enough water pooled on the ground beneath her to break the fall.

But she'd been almost seventy feet in the air when she'd dropped. Even if there were water, and even if she'd been controlling her fall, it would be devastating. And she definitely wasn't controlling it.

"FLY GODS DAMMIT!" He heard Gixelle yell his exact thoughts from where she was running beside him.

They lost sight of her for a moment as they ran past a large building, James thought it might have been a church or temple before it was burned, and James felt his heart drop when they emerged from the other side and didn't see her again.

But then he saw something insane that made him skid to a halt in the, oddly squishy he noticed, muck beneath them. He looked down for just a split second before realizing that they'd entered the area that the water had soaked, and he was standing in a mixture of ash, and mud.

But that wasn't important.

Flying through the air, being pulled by something that was dragging what looked like a chain, was a massive armored person with some kind of pronged contraption on their back.

The person had Veliry's limp form cradled in the crook of their right arm as they let the chain pull them through the air.

"What the hell?" He asked, not really expecting an answer.

"The Arbalestier." Gixelle answered, before starting to run again. "Come on."

They were too worried about Veliry to notice the hissing noise emanating from where the elemental's shriveled, but still moving, body lay.

\----------

When they got to Veliry a few moments later, it was almost as bad as James had feared.

The Arbalestier had lain her down on a blanket in a shallow pool of water that had formed. He was helping the burned mage drink a potion. The young mage that had been assisting in the fight was using healing magic on Veliry's feet for some reason.

"Is she okay?" James asked as they ran up. The mage stopped her casting for a moment, distracted by the interruption. The Armored man didn't even look their direction. He spoke first.

"She's very badly burned." He said in an accent that James thought would have been in place if they were in Saudi Arabia or somewhere like that. "But she's alive. I'm giving her something to help with the pain." He added as James and Gixelle ran up to Veliry's side.

Badly burned was, somehow, putting it lightly.

The mane of curly, frazzled, red hair that he'd always recognized her by was gone. In its place was a burn-curled, blackened fuzz where it had once been. The skin underneath was red and raw, James had a feeling that it would begin to form blisters soon. Her clothes hung in crisped tatters about her body, only bits and pieces of them still recognizable. Her right shoulder was burned deep enough that James thought they might be on the border of third degree. The rest of her skin was suffering from at least first degree. But most of the damage looked to be second degree.

How had she survived this?

"She needs a healer." He said, stating the obvious.

"Obviously." The armored man said flatly.

"Why are you healing her feet?" Gixelle asked of the young mage nearby.

"She asked us to." The mage, a young human girl, responded. "Said that she needed them to fly."

"Fly?" James asked. "Look at her. She's not flying anywhere."

"Yes." The man said gruffly. "We've had that conversation already. She says that it's got to be sealed."

"Called it." Gixelle said. James ignored her.

"But it's dead." James said. When the man looked at him, James could see the look of exasperation through the eye slits in the man's helmet.

"Is it?" The man asked.

Then James heard the hissing noise that he hadn't noticed earlier. As he turned around to look towards the hulk of the fallen Elemental, he began to hear a crackling popping noise.

It sounded an awful lot like ammo cooking off.

Then he heard a rustling from behind him as the man began to move, followed by several loud clacking noises that reminded him vaguely of a shotgun having a round chambered, though less metallic.

But he didn't have time to look at the man.

In front of him, the elemental was beginning to move again. It was only about fifty yards away, and yet as its body began to glow brighter and brighter, James could feel the heat radiating off of it.

It was like someone had just opened up a massive oven while he was standing right in front of it.

"Oh shit." He said.

"Do you have any magical abilities?" The man asked.

"None that can help." Gixelle said first.

The man nodded. "Then help get her to safety. We're clearly not going to have time to get her back up."

James looked at him and saw that he was holding a massive, multi-bow, crossbow in his arms the same way James had carried the SAW when he was in basic training.

"What about you?" He asked.

James looked back at the elemental, that was grabbing onto a nearby tree, reigniting it in the process, to lift itself back up.

"I have some magic." He admitted. Then he gestured to Gixelle."But she said that air and fire magic wouldn't help. And that earth magic would only buy time. And that's all I've got so far."

"Well." The man said. "She's right." The man stepped in front of James, odd not quite metal armor clanking as he did. "I'll leave it up to you." He said, talking to both James and the other mage. "I'm going to buy the big woman some time to move. See if I can draw it out of the hamlet. If you want to help, I won't complain." He drew a few bolts out of a pouch that definitely wasn't big enough to fit them and began slotting them into the crossbow. They glowed with a dull light that seemed to shift ever so slightly as James looked at them. "I won't blame you if you don't though. All I ask is that if you leave, you alert the next town you get to."

Then the man began walking toward the Elemental.

James looked at Gixelle as she gently picked up Veliry, cradling her in the blanket she was lying on. Veliry stirred a little bit, and said

something that James couldn't hear. James was about to begin walking when Kela came sprinting around the corner.

"Is she okay?" She asked. "I saw the Arbalestier catch her. How bad is it?"

James looked at her grimly. "It's not great." He said. Then he pointed toward the elemental. "And it's getting worse."

Kela was about to say something when Gixelle spoke up.

"James." She said. "Come here."

He hesitated for a moment, looking back at the still marching Arbalestier and Kela, then jogged over.

"What is it?" He asked.

"She's out." Gixelle said. "Still breathing. But unconscious." She held her hand up toward him. "She said you had to use this."

James took the offered item and looked at it curiously.

"What is it?" He asked.

"It's a sealing gem. She said that if you touched it to the things forehead, it would capture it permanently." She answered. "She was going to do it after the waterfall. But she got hurt too badly."

James looked at the gem. It was so small. No larger than a marble, or maybe a USB stick. Just a small red gem.

How can THIS possibly seal in THAT? He wondered.

"James." Gixelle said. "You have to hurry."

James looked back down at the gem. Then turned toward the elemental.

As he stood up he placed the gem in his mouth, holding it like a cigar. Then reached over his shoulder, into a specially designed bottomless bag that he'd had Veliry help him make before they'd left on this trip. It was designed specifically to be small and concealable.

He pulled out his Mage's blade and belted it to his waist. Then he reached back in and pulled out his rifle. It caught for a moment on the edge of the bag, but a quick wiggle loosed it. Another reach and he had a small mag pouch with two extra mags that he then fastened to the sword belt. It probably wouldn't do much to a god damn forty foot tall fire monster. But if he was about to die, then he was gonna at least give it a try.

He placed the sling of the rifle over his shoulder and neck and clipped it in place. Then he looked at Kela. She was looking at him with confusion.

"Got any crazy werewolf tricks to help with this?" He asked as he chambered a round.

"What?" She asked. "No. James you can't do this. You can't fight that thing." She said as she approached him.

"Probably not." He agreed.

"Then what are you doing?" She asked, stepping in front of him and placing her hands on his shoulders. "We need to leave."

He took a deep breath. "Ah hell." He said. "I've been needing to leave ever since I got to this place." He exhaled shakily. Then chewed his lower lip. "Help Gixelle get V to safety." He said as he shook her loose. "I'll either be back..... or I'll be dead and crispy, in a few minutes." Then he walked past her.

As he walked up to where the Arbalestier was now standing, weapon trained on the monster, Kela looked back at Gixelle. Gixelle just watched James go with a slight nod. After a moment Kela realized the futility in trying to stop any of this and went to help move the downed arch mage.

"Figured you'd leave." The Arbalestier said.

"Me or her?" James asked, nodding slightly at the young mage that had stepped up on his left.

"Same thing." The man said gruffly. He reached a hand up and raised his visor to look at James for a moment. James noticed that the man had bright orange eyebrows, or rather one and a half eyebrows. "Either way. You ready?" He asked.

"Nope." James answered simply.

The man let out a chuckle as he slapped the visor back down.

"Good answer." He said as he began marching forward again.

James shouldered his rifle as he walked forward to join the man. The young mage began casting, her hands beginning to emit frosty fog as she joined them.

In front of them, the Elemental was finally standing back up to its full height.

I'm gonna need some Aloe Vera after this. James thought.

Then, as the two others began firing off their attacks, he began jogging to the right.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (95/?)

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Writer's note: Yesterday was a brown letter day. AKA my stomach problems came back with a watery, chunky vengeance. But I'm not Aleron Kong, so don't worry, I'm not writing an entire chapter devoted to it.

Anyways. Enjoy.

PS: *For reference on one of the characters mentioned in this chapter. Think like a cross between a D&D Artillerist Artificer and an Arcane Archer Fighter.*

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James grunted as he pulled the young elf woman out from under the burning wreckage. Gixelle was straining against the fallen debris that was pinning the young woman, lifting them ever so slightly. James used his off hand to cast some earth magic, helping brace the burning wood with pillars of stone that sprung through the ground. Another tug on the woman's arms and he managed to get her out.

"Got her!" He yelled. "Let's go!"

Gixelle braced herself, then jumped out from under the wreckage and out of its way as it fell.

"You're sure she's the only one in there?" He asked.

Gixelle held up her hand, looking at the ring she'd placed on it before they'd gotten off the drakes. It pulsed a green light, pointing her at the nearest life forms. After a moment she nodded.

James turned to the two villagers nearby who'd already been helping get people when they'd arrived. One was a half orc named Torop. The other was a young kid named Jaex. He'd tried to convince the kid to go find shelter. But Jaex had insisted that he could help. So, James had simply given him the duty of getting the injured and unconscious to the cellar of a nearby farm that also had a well pump inside it.

There was a mage there named Trint, he was only an apprentice, who was helping keep the cellar safe. Trint's leg was broken pretty badly, but James had set it the best that he could, and the mage could still cast. So he was using wind magic to keep the cellar's air breathable, and had used earth magic to create a basin that they could fill with water.

It was better than nothing.

In the distance, nearly half a mile away now, Veliry continued to battle the massive, semi-sentient, pillar of fire that was the elemental. She

wasn't alone anymore either. Another mage had joined her. They couldn't fly like Veliry, but they still seemed more than capable of casting ice magic, and had taken up a sort of hit an run strategy to buy the Arch-Mage time for her more complex casts.

On top of that, someone else had joined the fight too. James had thought them to be a mage at first too. But as he'd taken a closer look he'd noticed that all their attacks seemed to be projectile based. When he'd asked Gixelle about it, she'd said that it was probably an "Arbalestier". When James had asked what that was, her description had given him the notion of a kind of "ye olde rocket launcher specialist", only using a massive crossbow. Whatever they were, their arrows (or bolts or whatever) were causing the elemental almost as much of a hassle as the two mages.

Despite the additional aid, the fight had still been going on for almost five hours now.

James and Gixelle didn't have the skills or abilities to go toe to toe with an elemental, so they'd been sidelined. After seeing the kind of destruction the elemental had caused, James was okay with that.

So, they'd gone about saving people. And there were a lot of people that needed it.

James broke from his train of thought as he watched Jaex carry the unconscious woman towards the cellar. Gixelle startled him by throwing a splash of water on the cloth wrapped around his head. When he looked at her she held the water skin out to him.

"Drink." She said simply. James just nodded and took the skin, drinking deeply for a second before pouring some on his face covering too. She took a sip when he gave it back. "Next house?" She asked.

"Til there aint none left." He said wearily before they began jogging again. "They're getting worse as we get closer." He said, stating the obvious.

"Yeah." She agreed. "They'll keep doing that until we're on top of the damn thing." She jerked her head toward the ongoing battle.

"I imagine that by then," He began. "It'll be less of a rescue operation, and more of a recovery operation."

She nodded as she lifted her ring up to look at it as they neared the building, it looked like it might have been a shop. She nodded grimly.

"Looks like two in here." She said. He just nodded as she tested the door handle. After feeling that it was only warm and not hot, like he'd told her, she shouldered the door open.

"HELLO!" She yelled. "IS THERE ANYONE HERE?"

James listened carefully as he crouch walked through the door. After a moment he added.

"WE'RE HERE TO HELP! YELL OUT IF YOU'RE HERE!"

The two of them entered the smoke of the still burning building.

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Veliry ignored the ache of her muscles, the migraine growing in her head, the sweat pouring off of her skin. She made a point of ignoring the burns she'd suffered.

She'd managed to avoid getting too badly hurt. But the monster had caught her off guard a few times, startling her with its speed, and she'd only managed to get her defensive spells up in time to survive. She'd be healing for some time after this, but she thought that she might have avoided the worst of it.

She'd fought elementals before. But she'd only ever fought ONE fire elemental before. Even then she'd been an apprentice, so it had been more akin to ASSISTING in a fight, than anything else. And as dangerous as the other types of elementals could be, not many compared to a fire elemental.

Earth elementals were slow, and as long as you could crack their stone you could probably beat one pretty easily. Hell, a group of dedicated warriors could beat an earth elemental. Water elementals were dangerous if you were at sea, but on land they were only dangerous if you WEREN'T a mage. Air elementals were startlingly dangerous, but also rare, and rarely malevolent, so they tended not to be an issue.

But fire elementals were a different story entirely. They were inherently malevolent. They weren't EVIL exactly, none of the elementals were, not unless a high level mage made them so. But unlike the other elementals, fire elementals ONLY knew how to destroy and consume. They were like rabid animals that way.

None of that changed what she had to do.

She was drawing energy for her magic from every source she could get as she flew around the swirling vortex of flame. The sun, the wind, the earth, herself, her stored energy crystals, even the heat of the elemental itself, she took energy from all of them. The light around her warped and distorted every time she cast a spell. She felt the power flow through her each time, feeling like every muscle and nerve and blood line was being electrified with each spell.

Casting under ordinary circumstances was empowering. Hells, she'd seen James's face alight every time he'd cast a new spell for the first time. She knew that she felt the same sensation, she was just used to it.

But that was normal casting. This was combat casting. And EXTENDED combat casting at that. As empowering as casting a spell could make a person feel, the sensation got old fast when your life was depending on it.

High-mage El'Dris, her old master had explained the difference when she was still an apprentice. She had said that how it made a person feel was similar to an orgasm, causing Veliry to blush at the time. Veliry had countered that that was a ridiculous comparison, that the two were nothing alike. But El'Dris had assured her that when she finally went through her first bout of extended combat casting, she'd understand that that could be a bad thing.

Veliry had gotten that "lesson", for the first time, many decades ago during a mage's tournament.

She was getting a reminder now. One that even the battle with the grabber clan hadn't come close to. Even as good as casting spells felt, especially high power spells like the ones she was using now, there was such a thing as "too much of a good thing". And her mind and body were already paying the price.

She'd hit it with a Heavenly Ice Spear and it had tried to throw it back at her.

She'd used fog cloud numerous times, both to buy herself time, and to prevent it from going towards any un-burned buildings.

She'd shot it with numerous frost rays and water blasts. Had even managed to blast its arms off a few times.

But it still came, growing the limbs back and healing the damage in moments.

Her position high in the air, and her focus on hitting and avoiding the monster had kept her from thinking too much about the damage it had done.

But she was beginning to wear out.

The addition of the two other people fighting had helped ease the physical and mental burden. The mage, a young third year girl from the western academy was doing a good job of drawing the elemental's attention, buying her precious moments to either recuperate, or to cast more powerful spells. But they were clearly out of their depth.

The Arbalestier, on the other hand, was incredible. She didn't know how he was moving as fast as he was, wearing the full suit of armor that he was. But he was doing an amazing job of confusing the massive elemental. His enchanted bolts were some of the best she'd ever seen. In fact, she thought some of them might have even been on par with her spells. Whoever he was, he was a long time veteran of his chosen field.

She'd owe both of them drinks after this.

It was during one of the armored man's volleys that she managed to finally cast a spell that she'd been wanting to use for hours.

The space around her distorted as she raised her hands to the sky. The clouds on the horizon began moving rapidly, pushing the smoke and ash in

the air out of their way like wind blowing away fog. She began chanting in the ancient guttural language of the druids.

Sorry Walks-with-does. She thought. *I know I'm not supposed to know druid magic.*

The elemental regained its "footing" after recovering from the volley of ice enchanted bolts. Then, seeming to sense the change in the atmosphere, craned its head up to look at her, then the sky.

It roared as it began opening its mouth to breath fire at her.

Just as the flames began to emerge she clapped her hands together, forming a double fist.

The gathered clouds slammed into each other with a clap, and began condensing into rain drops.

As the flames began racing outwards from the monster's mouth, she pressed her hands together tighter, as if trying to crush something. And in a way, she was.

The rain drops pressed together until they formed an almost solid column of water nearly as big around as her tower at the castle, and nearly as tall.

As she watched the flames fly ever closer, feeling the heat of them begin to dry the sweat from her skin, she brought her fists down like she was trying to smash them into a tabletop.

And the massive column of water in the sky came hurtling down like a meteor right on top of the damnable fire monster.

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James and Gixelle stopped in the middle of pulling an elder Gnomish man from the shop to watch what was happening when they heard the loudest roar the elemental had given yet.

Kela stopped in the middle of a sprint from one building to the next, skidding to a halt as she smelled the familiar scent of rain and saw the skies darken.

The villagers, what few there were still out and about, including Torop and Jaex froze where they stood as they saw the clouds crash together, and the flames race towards the flying mage.

They all watched, none of them even noticing that they'd begun holding their breath, as the massive pillar of rainwater came crashing down, racing to hit the elemental before its breath attack hit Veliry.

More than a few of them had the same thought as James did at that moment.

If this doesn't work. What the hell will? James thought.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (94/?)

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Writer's note: Spent yesterday and the day before curled up into a ball trying not to vomit or poop to death. Super fun.

Bit of a short one because I'm still pretty drained.

Enjoy.

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As it turned out, the drakes had no issue separating when they were told to run.

James had been worried that they would still be attached at the hip, and as such slower, while they ran. But Gixelle had assured him that that wouldn't be an issue once they got up to speed. She'd been right and now Maxel was running just a few yards ahead of Steve. Now the two of them rode towards the burning hamlet.

Roughly thirty minutes after they began Kela came flying back down. She had the griffin begin flying circles around them as they slowed down.

"What's the news?" James asked. "Bandits? Monsters? More grabbers?"

"Worse!" She said. "There's a damned fire elemental!"

"What?" Gixelle asked. "What the hell is one of those doing here?"

"I don't know." Kela replied as the griffin circled around again. "It isn't a very big one. But the villagers don't have anything that can handle it." She circled again. "I'm going to go get Veliry. She'll be a better match for it than any of us."

"What can we do then?" James asked.

"Stay out of the things path and help the towns people!" She yelled over her shoulder as she flew off to get the mage.

"That's all we can do?" He asked Gixelle as they began riding again.

"That's all you and I can do." She answered. "Elementals are a whole different kind of monster. A fire elemental can burn anything. Even Kela and the drakes can't survive a fight with one of them."

"Really? But I thought drakes were fire proof?"

"Against normal fire. And against their own fire especially." She said grimly. "But not an elemental's. And if Kela got hit by one she wouldn't heal from it. She'd be as burned as any normal person is."

"How the hell did one get here?" He asked.

"No idea. These things just tend to appear from time to time." She replied. "Lots of theories, and I'm sure Vel could give you better answers. But as far as I know, there isn't an agreed upon theory for what causes Elementals to manifest."

"Great." James said.

"We'll be on foot when we get there." Gixelle said, ignoring his sarcasm. "The drakes won't go near one of those things right now. I wouldn't want them to anyways." She pulled a few water skins from her saddle bags and began putting their straps around her shoulders. "Grab all the water you can. You have a handkerchief or a towel or something?" She asked as she pulled her own out and wrapped it around her neck.

"Uh. Yeah." He replied as he began following suit.

"Good. We'll need them to breath if it gets too smoky. And the water will help us keep cool and avoid burning." She looked back at him. "Don't bother with weapons. Don't use your fire or wind magic. They'll only make things worse."

"What about my earth magic?"

"That should be fine." She pulled out a ring with a green gem on it and put it on her right middle finger. "In fact that might even be useful. May even let you hold off the elemental for a few seconds if it decides to attack you."

"Good to know." He said.

Then they rounded the bend and finally saw the hamlet with their own eyes.

It was worse than James had expected.

Standing, or rising, or whatever you want to call it, to his right (The west) of the town, was a massive animated pillar of fire and smoke that had to be at least forty feet tall. One that was moving.

It didn't have a face. At least James didn't think it did. But it did have arms, and a body of sorts, and seemed to rise up like a twister from the ground. Its body writhed back and forth as its arms lashed out at the buildings of the town.

"Jeeeezus...." James said softly to himself. "I thought Kela said that it wasn't very big?"

Gixelle looked at him curiously, forgetting for a moment that he wasn't of this world. "It isn't." She answered. "That's a lesser elemental. The greater elementals can be hundreds of feet tall. Those're city destroyers."

"Fuckin' hell." James replied.

"Yeah. Come on." She said, kicking Maxel back into motion. James hadn't even realized that they'd stopped.

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It took another ten minutes for them to actually reach the edge of town. They had to stop when Maxel slid to a halt. When Steve tried to continue on she hissed harshly, causing him to slide to a stop and look back warily. Another hiss and the massive black drake slunk back to his mate and leaned against her. She knocked her head into his before the two of them began walking AWAY from the town.

"That's our cue." Gixelle said matter of factly. "We're on foot from here."

James slid off of Steve's back and away from the two entwined drakes as they were walking.

"Hey!" Gixelle yelled. Maxel looked back at her curiously. "Stay close!" Maxel looked at her a moment longer, then turned and began walking again, Steve at her side.

James shouldered the last of the water skins and wrapped his, already wet, microfiber towel around his neck. The smell of smoke, and something else that smelled oddly savory, were thick in the air.

"C'mon." He said. "I can already hear people screaming."

"Yeah." She said in reply.

The two of them began jogging towards the burning hamlet.

Once they'd gotten about halfway, a shadow from above made them look up. When they did they saw Kela's griffin speeding overhead, straight towards the elemental. It was high up enough that James could have covered the creature with his thumb.

"She's about to drop in." Gixelle said as he picked his pace back up.

"How's she going to fight it?" He asked.

"Carefully." She said simply. "Ice and water spells mostly. But knowing her, she'll try to seal it."

"Seal it?" He wondered.

"Yes. If she has a vessel capable of holding that kind of power she'll try to capture it." As she said this, they neared the first house on the outskirts of town, a small cottage. "That's not our fight. Go check that one down there." She said as she pointed at a stone house a few dozen yards away.

"On it." He said before running that way.

Overhead he saw Veliry dropping from the griffin. He saw the sky around her darken, as if all the light was being sucked out of it. Then he saw a massive plume of white frost shoot forth from her like a giant fire hydrant being fired. The elemental turned, sensing the incoming attack somehow and reached out to strike at her flying form. But when the plume of white hit its outstretched arm the arm blackened and shrank.

The elemental let out a roar like nothing James had ever heard before. It was like a train moving past at speed, but with a deep guttural tone that sounded like a voice. He also heard a crackling noise that reminded him of a campfire. But it was also much deeper, almost like gunshots going off at random.

It sounds like ammo cooking off. He thought suddenly. *Only worse, because it's alive.*

Without realizing it, he'd already reached the next house.

The house looked okay, a simple two story stone building with the standard thatched roof that was common in this country. The fire elemental hadn't touched it yet. But that didn't matter. James knocked on the door anyways.

After knocking for a few minutes he saw someone come from around the side of the building. He was a young Dwarvish man with scraggly blonde hair. He had a shovel in his hands.

"What do ya want?" He asked, shovel raised up.

James raised his hands to show he wasn't a threat.

"This your house?" He asked.

"It is." Said the man. "Least until that thing gets here." He pointed his shovel towards the elemental.

"You got somewhere safe to hide?" James asked.

"Aye. Wife and kids're in the cellar. So was I til I heard you slammin' at the door."

"Good." James said, already beginning to walk away. "Stay there." He was about to begin jogging, seeing Gixelle doing the same down the street. Before he did he turned back. "Hey, is there a river or lake or something nearby?" He asked.

The man scratched his head for a moment. Then answered. "Aye, there's the Klegson's pond about a mile that way." He replied while pointing to the east.

"Klegsons." James said, making a note of the name in his mind. "Alright. Keep an eye on the elemental. If it starts heading this way, get you and yours to that pond." He said. The farmer nodded before rounding the corner.

James jogged to catch up to Gixelle. As he did he saw Veliry flying around the elemental, which was now swinging at her like a drunk in a bar brawl. At one point it reeled its "head" back, and when it came forward again it seemed to breath fire at the flying mage.

James was worried for a second that she might've been hit. But when the flames diminished She was holding her position, a shimmering field of blue surrounding her. Then the blue field shifted into the shape of an enormous blade and began hurtling toward the elemental.

He would have kept watching. But then Kela landed next to him.

"What's the plan?" She asked.

He turned to her, still jogging. "Make sure everyone is safe. Evacuate the ones that aren't." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "That farmer mentioned a 'Klegson's pond'" He said. "Might be a good place for them to go. Lots of water."

"What about the wounded, or the trapped?" She asked.

"Improvise." He said. "Do what you can. But don't die."

Kela nodded. Then kicked her griffin back into flight.

"I'll start on the far side of town!" She yelled back as she took off. James just nodded.

He paused for a moment as he reached the next house's door. He looked to Veliry's fight. The blade of blue energy was sunk deep into the Elemental's chest, and tendrils of blue light were spreading out from it. Where the tendrils touched, the Elemental's 'flesh' darkened. Once again James heard that ammo-cooking-off roar. Then the elemental wrenched the massive blade out of its chest and threw it at Veliry.

The blade dissipated the second it neared her. As it did it filled the area with a thick fog. The elemental did not like that.

"Good luck with all that craziness." He said to himself before knocking on the door in front of him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (93/?)

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Writer's Note: Things occur. People begin going places. Excitement looms on the horizon.

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"I guess the search is over." Amina said with a sigh of exhaustion. "We've searched everywhere that won't cause a bloody riot. Plus a few that probably would've under other circumstances."

She said this as she read the last of the reports that the guard had submitted to her over the past few days. One of her Commanders, a gruff dwarven woman named Laka, was seated opposite of her and to the right at the wide table they were on. Captain Zence was at the board nearby with a few guard sergeants updating the city map with the intel. Other soldiers and aides bustled about the room silently as they read reports, sorting them into piles based on usefullness.

"It has been almost a week since we found anything." Laka agreed. "And that was a staff of infestation that, for all we know, could've just been left behind by some random druid." She chuckled. "It was kinda funny that it was being used to prop open a window though."

She turned to one of the aides nearby. "Anything new from Jadesport?" Amina asked.

The aide put down the pages they'd been looking at and picked up a nearby notepad.

"The General followed up on the missing soldier, and found signs of a struggle near one of the patches of blight. Suspects that the man in question was likely thrown in by the Grinner. According to his fellow soldiers he had a habit of relieving himself into the blight." The aide read a bit more. "Random stashes of magical items throughout Jadesport. Same as here mostly. Some that match the Grinner's methods. Some, like that staff the commander mentioned, that may just be incidental." The aide shrugged. "Nothing substantial your highness."

Amina rubbed her forehead at the mention of the missing soldier's habit. Then simply sighed and turned back.

"I'm gonna guess the other cities are much the same." Laka said with a huff as she crossed her broad arms across her chest. "I think you're right Ma'am. I think that short of checkin' in people's trousers, we've found about all we can." The commander turned to a sergeant over in another part of the room. "Sergeant Emine, anything related to the Agency?"

The sergeant in question turned toward the dwarf with a look of insecurity, then shook his head. "No Commander." He said. "If there's anyone in the city connected to them. They either got caught on the first few days, or scattered to the wind. And none of the prisoners, few as they are, have given anything useful." He took a deep breath before adding. "And the King's orders were not to resort to necromancy. Last resort only."

"I know." Laka replied. "Thank you."

She turned back to Amina and nodded grimly.

Amina laced her hands together as she rested her elbows on the table. Then she leaned her face into them and hid her eyes. After a moment she stood up and began walking towards the door.

"Laka, we're done, clean everything up." Her jaw clenched for a moment. "I'll tell my father, and see what Marcos needs for..." She looked at Sergeant Emine, who had gone back to reading his reports. "The other thing."

Laka nodded as she said. "Aye Ma'am."

As Amina walked out the door she heard the dwarf giving out orders to clean the room up and bring the search parties in for debrief. Then she gave a warning to get as much sleep as they could, while they could.

Amina stood there for a moment listening to this, before taking a deep breath and straightening her armor a bit. Then she began walking towards her father's chambers.

At least I'll be able to take off to catch up to James soon. She thought.

\------------------

The next day, James woke up to a great message on his phone.

>Search for Grinner's traps over.
>
>I begin traveling tomorrow.
>
>Will see you soon.
>
>\-Amina

He'd woken up first, so he'd pulled a few of the chicken carcasses out of the bag that had the drake's food in it and threw them into Steve and Maxel's nightly den. He ignored the wet crunching noises that he heard behind him as he walked back to the camp.

As he walked he thought he faintly smelled smoke. He'd thought that maybe someone had already restarted the camp fire. But when he got there, Kela was just barely waking up and slowly shambled out of her tent.

"You smell that?" He asked as he passed her with a bundle of twigs from the nearby trees.

She looked at him groggily, then raised her snout into the air and began sniffing.

"Fire?" She asked. "Ours?"

He held up the twigs for her to see. "Not started yet."

Kela's entire demeanor shifted immediately. She seemed to wake up entirely in the blink of an eye. She quickly stepped back into her tent and emerged with her axe.

"Wake the others." She instructed him. "I'm gonna take Kex up for a look." She said. James nodded.

"How close is the nearest town?" He asked as he tossed the twigs in the general direction of the camp fire and began walking towards Veliry's carriage. "Durn Hamlet Right?"

Kela was pulling some things out of one of her bags, James saw a looking glass. "Yes. And only about half a day." She tucked the looking glass and what James assumed was a map into the pockets of her pajamas. Then she began jogging toward where the griffin had been tied up.

James knocked on the side of the carriage. He didn't hear anything, so he knocked again, louder. This time he heard movement.

"Vel!" He half yelled. "Wake up. We might have trouble."

After another moment the door opened and Veliry's head popped out, hair even messier than normal.

"What's going on?" She asked sleepily.

"Don't know." He admitted. "But there's smoke, and it aint ours. Get ready to move."

"Okay." She said, clearly still not completely understanding. "Okay, right." Then she went back into the carriage, shutting the door behind her.

Luckily, Gixelle had woken up from the banging on Veliry's carriage. The massive warrior woman was standing in front of her tent and was already strapping on her leather armor. James looked at her.

"I heard." She said simply. James nodded, then jogged over to his tent and began putting his armor on too.

Ten minutes later Kela returned on Kex's back. She landed the griffin right next to the camp and then trotted it right next to her tent and hopped off.

The three of them had already broken down the tents and were in the process of stuffing them into their respective bottomless bags. Gixelle had gone off to coax out the two drakes from their den.

"What's the word?" James asked as Kela began putting her own armor on.

"The hamlet's burning." She said as she strapped her shin guards on over her pajamas. "Once I got up there I could smell blood too."

"Fantastic." James said simply. "How fast do you think we can get there?"

"If we run the beasts flat out?" She asked rhetorically. "I can get there in about half an hour. You and Gixelle could do maybe AN hour. Depending on how the drakes do while all cuddly." She jerked her head towards the carriage. "That's the slow one." She said. "That'll take probably two or more hours to get there. Even at top speed."

"We can throw the camp into the carriage." Veliry interjected as she walked by with Gixelle's bottomless bag in her arms. "I can catch up. You guys should go." She said.

"You sure?" James asked.

"I can take care of myself. And if anything crazy starts going down I can always fly to catch up." She assured him as she chucked the tent through her carriage's door.

"Fair enough." James said in reply. He turned back to Kela, who was fastening on the last gauntlet. "What's the plan?" He asked.

"That's for you to decide. You're my pack leader." She pulled her helmet out and place it firmly on her head. "You're the captain here." She said as she lifted her axe back up.

"Right." He said. "Forgot about that." He thought for a moment. "Okay. Kela, get there as fast as possible. Figure out what's going on. If you can help, do it. But if it's something insane, or the odds are just.... impossible, ride back to us and let us know what we're heading into."

She nodded and she was about to walk walk back towards Kex when James stopped her.

"Don't get killed." He said.

"You're the only one who gets to do that. Remember?" She said. Then she was on Kex's back and flying back into the sky.

A minute later Gixelle returned, two drakes in tow behind her. She was straining to keep the two beasts moving.

"Woulda been easier if you guys had sealed the hole first." She said. "What'd Kela say?"

"Looks like fight time." James replied as he walked up and threw Steve's saddle on the drake's back. Kela's moving up to scout, and help if she can. We're gonna catch up ASAP. Then Veliry's gonna bring up the rear."

"Finally." The clan mother said. "Something to break the monotony."

"No jokes." He said sternly. "Kela already smells blood. Let's go help."

Five minutes later. They took off to do just that.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/t4jljx/wait_is_this_just_gate_94/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (92/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/szs7r9/wait_is_this_just_gate_91/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James levels up, and the griffin gets a name.

Snowfall in my area has me physically exhausted.

Enjoy.

\~

"Alright, are you guys ready?" James asked.

"Been ready for about five minutes." Kela said with amusement. "Are you gonna show us your 'Big Project' or not?" She asked.

"Okay. Okay. Sorry." He said. "I've been working on this for the past week or so, whenever I have some down time. It started with just like... rope and string and stuff. But I finally got it to work yesterday."

Gixelle and Veliry were sitting on their make shift chairs, a stump and a bag of rice respectively, and Kela was standing behind them. They'd already set camp for the night, and Kela had been on the verge of grabbing James for combat training when he'd assured her that she needed to see what he'd figured out how to do.

"Gixelle. Do you know what he's talking about?" Veliry asked. "You've been riding with him the whole trip."

"I do." She said with a grin. "But he asked me to keep it under wraps. I think you'll both like it though."

They both turned towards James with curiosity now.

"So." He said. "I've been working on my magic. AND I've been working on my fighting, including with this." He gestured to the chain weapon that

he had wrapped around his chest and shoulder. "And I was wondering if I could combine the two."

Kela's eyebrow rose a bit, and Veliry spoke up.

"Did you come up with this on your own?" She asked. "Wielding a weapon and magic together is very difficult if the weapon isn't designed specifically FOR that."

James's nodded. "That actually explains a lot." Then he smiled. "Well I still made it work.

Veliry looked at Gixelle, who just smiled.

James grabbed the handle of the chain and began pulling it off from around him. But as he got to about the halfway point he began casting wind magic with the hand that was holding the handle. His clothes and hair began to flutter as the magic caused wind to flow around him.

"He's not using the gestures." Veliry said, eyes wide.

The chain began to unravel, seemingly of its own accord. James simply held the wielding hand out wide and the chain continued unwinding. After a few moments it had completely come loose and seemed to twist and spin above its handle. It reminded them all of a snake that was looking at multiple targets. The barbed links towards the ends seemed top almost snap back and forth as the chain moved.

James held his arm out and pointed the chain's handle toward a nearby tree. The chain began moving that way, straightening out as it did. At about the halfway point it seemed to droop for a moment, and James grunted with the effort of maintaining the spell. It gained tension again and continued its course. After a second it hit the tree, then began coiling around it.

Then James jerked the chain back a bit, causing it to lose its hold on the tree. He moved the chain to the right, spinning it just a bit as he did, the chain began spinning like a sideways whirlpool. Its ends occasionally hit the ground with dull impacts.

When he finally got the chain pointed straight in front of him, still whirling around and hitting the ground, James pulled it back. It began bunching up in front of him before the end piece snaked over the bundle, then over his shoulder. Then the whole chain began coiling around him, back into its original stored position.

"Woah." Kela said in surprise. "That was pretty impressive."

"Yeah..." Veliry agreed. "You figured that out yourself?" She asked James.

"Yeah." He said, smiling from ear to ear. "It took A LOT of effort. It was a pain in the ass to get the wind to actually encompass the chain. And even harder to get it to move in anything other than a straight line

or a gentle curve." He shook his head lightly. "Getting it to actually double back on itself like that, without losing cohesion?" He patted the chain. "I was starting to think it was impossible."

"Well. It's not." Veliry said. "Obviously. But it is very difficult. Especially with wind magic." Her eyes were glowing a dull orange color as she looked at James. "But James. I think you've reached the next threshold in your magical ability."

"What?" He asked. "Like I leveled up?"

"I don't know what that is." She admitted as she moved forward and began inspecting the arm that he'd used to move the chain. "But your energy control, both internal and external, is significantly improved from when we first began teaching you magic."

"What does that mean?" He asked. "I mean. I understand the words. But what does it mean for my training?"

She stepped back, her eyes returning to their normal color. "It means that we can start teaching you more complex spells. And we can start teaching you how to combine spells."

"What like this?" He stepped to the side, and sprayed fire out of his right hand toward the sky. Then his left hand sent a blast of air through the gout of flame and began accelerating it. It also seemed to grow hotter as he did. After a moment he brought the two hands together and the twin streams combined and the flamethrower-like spray became a torrent of scorchingly hot hell-fire.

The whole group had stepped back unconsciously, and Veliry had to drop her hands from in front of her.

She looked at James, eyes glowing again, and analyzed the flow of energy through him.

"How?" She asked under her breath.

After another five seconds or so James let the magic relent. He blew on the hand that had been spraying fire.

"That gets a touch warm." He said, as if commenting on a pan cooking food.

"James. When did you figure out how to do that?" Veliry asked.

He shrugged. "I don't know. I'd kinda had the idea to combine wind and fire a while ago. That was actually the first time I'd done it to that scale." He said, gesturing over his shoulder at where the flames had been just a few moments before. "Plus I focused on increasing oxygen levels with the wind magic. That's why it got so hot."

"Oxygen?" Veliry asked.

"Yeah. You know? Air?" He said, confused.

"Okay. But what's oxygen?" She asked.

"Do you guys not know about chemical compositions?"

"Of course we do." Kela answered before Veliry could. "Hell, smithing and potion brewing all involve chemicals of various kinds. Kraug could tell you about chemicals all day. So could Veliry."

"Hold up." Veliry stopped her. "I think this is one of those things where our worlds have different meanings for similar things." She turned back to James. "Can you clarify what you mean?"

James took a deep breath.

"I can." He said. "But I think it'd be better if I pulled up some stuff on my phone." She bobbed his head once as he grimaced. "And checked if it was okay with command."

"Okay." Veliry said. "Either way James. You're in the advanced lessons now."

James just sighed, knowing that that meant things were getting tougher, and pulled out his phone to send a message to Earth.

Thirty minutes later, after the drones had bounced the messages back and forth a few times, James was explaining molecules and atoms to the group.

Gixelle got lost fairly quickly. Kela pretended to understand, but asked questions that made it obvious that she didn't. Not bad questions, but still.

Veliry, on the other-hand, looked like a kid that had just been handed a one hundred dollar bill and then thrown into a toy store. He had a feeling that the Arch Mage was seeing a whole new set of options for her magic. And likely her other studies back at the castle, and in her carriage.

James had a feeling that he might regret teaching the mage about the periodic table. Though, he didn't quite know why.

\-------------------------

Vickers whistled as he sat on top of the cage wagon.

They'd restarted their journey two days ago, after the other guard had been deemed good enough to travel, and were actually making good time despite the cold.

The merchant had already managed to offload a good portion of the goods that he'd managed to get from the bandits. Vickers had used his cut to upgrade the griffin's cage and get it one that was both sturdier, and more covered. It was getting cold and he didn't want his new friend/pet

dying of hypothermia. Assuming it even could get hypothermia, he didn't know.

He'd also bought a harness and a second hand beak muzzle from the town stable. As a result he was now able to take the griffin out of the cage from time to time and let it walk. It seemed amiable to people now. He had a feeling that the bandits hadn't treated it terribly well. But it had seemed to get the message that HE wasn't going to do that. Between his gentle hand and the fact that he was feeding it on a routine schedule, it had warmed up to him quite a bit.

It had been wary the first time he'd entered the cage. And it had puffed its feathers up when he'd first tried to put the harness on it. But he'd simply sat down in the cage and held the harness out where the griffin could inspect it at will. He didn't know why he'd done that. It had just felt right.

After a few moments the griffin had began to let its feathers smooth back out, and had craned its neck forward to sniff at the harness. Vickers had stayed stock still until it had begun nipping at the hard leather. Then Vickers had dropped the harness and slowly moved his hand up until he could place it on the griffin's head. The griffin had frozen when he did. Then Vickers had begun petting the creature. After a moment its eyes had closed and it had begun cooing under his hand.

Getting the harness on had been easy after that. And the griffin hadn't had any issues putting it on any of the times after that either. Now when he opened the door to the cage it would stand eagerly, as if excited for its daily walk. Its leopard-like tail would swish back and forth rapidly until it got out the door.

On the third day of their restarted journey, as Vickers was walking his new pet, he decided on a name.

"Sooner or later you're going to fly with me. You're half cat, half bird of prey. And I'm Navy." He said as he walked the griffin around their camp. It craned its head to look at him curiously for a moment. "So I think I'll call you Tom. Like the old F-14s from the top gun days. You'll be Tom the flying cat."

Tom pounced on something Vickers couldn't see, and when he stood back up there was a lizard of some kind in his mouth. He shook it a few times, then tossed his head back and swallowed it whole.

"Gross." Vickers said. Then he thought for a moment. "Tom would be kind of an awkward name if you ended up being female. But whatever."

Then the two of them began walking again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/t1g2jb/wait_is_this_just_gate_93/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (91/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/syvfzp/wait_is_this_just_gate_90/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: .... idk. I got nothing. Carry on.

Enjoy.

\~

"JAMES! NO MAGIC!" Gixelle yelled from across the bar.

James dodged under a swung chair, then pivoted and struck out with a fist, jabbing into the assailant's stomach and causing them to double over, winded.

"ALSO, DON'T KILL ANYONE!" She added before grunting.

James felt something, or maybe someone, bump into him as he wrapped his arms around the chair swinger. He heaved up, trying for a suplex, and then someone slammed into both of them. James dropped the person, and began elbowing the new attacker.

"OKAY!" He yelled back. He felt a fist slam into his ribs. He grunted from the impact "I'll try." He said, using the air that had just been knocked out of him. Then someone hit him in the face.

This was James's first ever bar brawl.

If someone had hit him in the face like that before he'd come through the summoning portal, it would have probably knocked him out. Or at the very least, heavily dissuaded him from doing anything for a while. As it was though, James had been training with Amina, Gixelle, Kela, Artair, and even Kraug back when they were at the castle. He'd been hit in the face and head plenty of times as a result. Plus there was the battle with the grabbers, where he'd taken a lot of impacts to a lot of other places too.

He was tougher now. And he'd learned a lot about fighting,

That didn't make his jaw or ribs hurt any less. It just made the pain easier to handle. His brain automatically sorted it into a new category of "Not as bad as having an arrow punched through your shoulder because a monster just used you as a hammer". And as a result, it wasn't as hard to deal with.

His knee impacted the grappler's ribs, and he grabbed their arms in what probably looked like an old WWE wrestling move, and used their upward momentum from his kick to raise them up a bit. Then he let them drop, but didn't release their arms.

He heard a pop from the person's left shoulder. Then they screamed and he kicked them away from him.

He didn't know exactly what had started the brawl. But he had an idea.

Gixelle had been drinking with some of the Drinton locals nearby. James had been enjoying a sandwich that he thought might have been this world's answer to a Reuben. When he'd heard one of the locals Gixelle had been talking to shout out. "THEY TREAT BABIES LIKE THAT?"

He'd barely had time to look in that direction before an ale mug had flown past his head and struck the bartender in the face.

And then the brawl had begun. The entire room had exploded into violence.

In the brief moment after he had dislocated the shoulder of his assailant, and before the next person became an issue, James scanned the room.

Off to his left Gixelle was being the warrior he already knew she was. In one hand she held the back of a chair. The chair was pinning someone to a wall about three feet too high for their feet to touch the ground. In her other hand she held a woman, who was almost as muscular as Gixelle was, off the ground by their hair. A dwarf was hanging onto Gixelle's back and trying to get her in a choke-hold. But Gixelle was slamming her head back into the dwarf's face, turning it into a bloody mess. The dwarf, to his credit, wasn't letting go. But he also wasn't making any progress towards choking the massive woman either.

He looked further to his left and saw the back of a head of scraggly reddish hair dissappear out the front door. Veliry had made her escape. Probably a good thing since she wasn't really the "hand to hand" person, and Gixelle had made it clear that magic was a no-no in this situation.

He was about to look for Kela, who he knew was somewhere to his right, when something slammed into his back hard enough to floor him. Wood splinters flew all around him, and he realized that there was a new chair wielder to deal with. He quickly rolled onto his back and then rolled again, just in time to avoid a massive booted foot slamming into where his chest had been.

His new assailant was a stocky man who looked like they were some kind of lumberjack or something. It didn't matter. James swung his foot out sideways and swept the mans leg out wide, putting him off foot. Then as he rose up, he punched the man in the kidney, the man doubled over clutching his side, then James punched the man in the side of the face as hard as he could and watched him rag-doll to the ground.

Then James got hit in the side of the face too. Everything went blurry for a moment, and he staggered. He stood, reeling as he did, and tried to bring the world back into alignment as he leaned against the bar. Then he saw a massive greenish brown blob, that he was pretty sure was an orc fist, rushing towards him.

In the brief moment before the blob hit his face, he had time to think. *I don't think my training or repeated impacts to the head are gonna save me from this.*

He was right, and that was the last memory of the night.

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James woke up in his tent with a start. He bolted upright and then immediately fell back, clutching his head. He groaned.

"Oh hey. You're awake." He heard Gixelle say from outside.

A moment later the tent flap opened as she stepped inside.

"How're you feeling?" She asked as she grabbed a water skin from the pile of gear near the door. She walked over and handed it too him.

"I feel like Steve used my head as a chew toy." He replied before drinking deeply from the water.

"You're not far off." She said. "That orc was on the verge of doing just that when Kela stepped in."

He drank a few more gulps before asked. "How's she doing? I lost track of her."

"Well she's mad. Keeps going on about how it looks bad for a Captain to be part of a bar fight." She shrugged, then continued. "But she's fine, nobody there coulda done her any real harm anyways."

"I think I saw Vel run out the door. She good too?" He asked.

"Yep. She did just that."

"All I remember was one of those guys you were with saying something about babies. Then the bartender got nailed by a beer mug." He stated. "What the fuck happened?"

She hung her head. "I might've..... Told them about your 'taking candy from babies' phrase." She admitted. "They were less understanding then I was."

James stared at her for a moment. Then he just rolled back onto his back and placed his pillow over his face.

"Sorry." She said meekly.

"Are we in trouble?" He asked, ignoring the apology. "Are we gonna have a bunch of town guards chase us down the road and arrest us?"

"No." She answered. "Luckily, bar brawls are pretty common. Long as nobody gets killed, and the bar gets payed for the damages, nobody gets anything worse than a night in the jail." She gestured at his face. "People who get knocked out, or badly injured, are healed enough to survive. And then the remaining healing is considered their punishment."

James could understand that. He nodded, causing his pillow to bounce back and forth.

"Okay. How much time did we lose while I was out?" He asked.

"Oh, not much. The fight was last night." She answered. "Sun came up about two hours ago."

"Awesome." He said flatly. "Let's pack and move out."

"You sure?" She asked. "We can take a day to rest."

"Nope." He said as he rolled over and sat up. "Let's just go."

"Okay." She replied. She clearly got the message of his unhappiness.

An hour later, they'd linked up with Veliry and Kela. Kela was as unhappy about the previous night's events as Gixelle had said. And James was tempted to make a joke about not having any cat fights in the group. But thought better of it.

Then they continued on down the road.

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"Ugh.... I could do without that Marcos guy." General Krick said as he left the conference room.

They'd just finished their fifth teleconference with the King and his aides. This one had primarily been focused on learning about each side's written and, more importantly, spoken languages. As a result they had had an extended conversation with one of the King's "Arch-Mages". An elderly man who spoke very slowly, and read the converted text from the screen on their side even slower.

To say that it was a test of the General's patience was an understatement.

It didn't help that he had to hide the fact that, thanks to Vickers and even Choi, they already had a fairly comprehensive grasp on the written language. And were even pretty well off with the spoken language.

This meeting had primarily been about refining it.

The linguists had been instructed to program the communication hub with numerous "translation errors" to make it look like the program was more flawed than it actually was. In truth; all the books and pages that both Choi and Vickers had transmitted, combined with recordings of both of the men's recorded conversations in the foreign languages, had resulted in a fairly complete lexicon.

But they had to play coy and keep their cards hidden.

Still, speaking with Marcos had been grating.

"That guy must be damn good at magic for the King to keep him around." The General said, not really addressing anyone in particular.

"Apparently." Replied the Colonel, who was walking behind him. "He's one of the two mages who lead the ritual that summoned Captain Choi and Sergeant Odikowe." She said. "According to Choi, it's a very intense ritual that requires great magical skill and power."

"If they say so." He countered as he stuck one of his smokes into his mouth and lit it. "Thank god the Army has age limits."

"Agreed." She said simply.

"What's the news on Vickers?" He asked as he inhaled deeply of the CBD and caffeine infused smoke.

"He's reconnected with the merchant he's travelling with, and had a bit of a windfall from all the items he got from the bandit camp. No need for more counterfeits for him." She answered "Plus he's been earning the trust of the griffin that was there. He's at the point of being able to pet it without it snapping."

"Cool." He said flatly before exhaling, letting the minty smoke drift toward the vents. "How long till he's got eyes on the capital?"

"At current rates? Another month and a half." She replied. "But he says that, according to the merchant, the griffin can get him there in about a week and a half once its strong enough, and ride-able."

"So a month and a half then?" He asked rhetorically.

She answered anyways. "Yes sir."

"And the camp?" He asked as he looked at the messages on his phone.

"Both operatives are effectively integrated into the town. Arroyo has taken up station at the local tavern as, and I wish I was making this up, a 'Travelling bard, known by the name of Elvis Presley'." She said as she shook her head.

The General let out a single short laugh as a grin spread across his face. "Oooookay then." he said. "And Lucas?"

"He's become a healer's assistant." She answered. "He convinced the town healing mage to take him on as an apprentice. He told them that he was from a small village that didn't have a healing mage, and so he only knows standard medical training, setting breaks, bandaging wounds, sutures. That kind of stuff. The healer agreed, and he's now being taught basic healing magic"

The General nodded as he stuck out his lower lip a bit. Then he took a long drag and finished off the smoke. "Not bad." He said as he exhaled. "Both are good positions to gain intel. One ingratiates you to the

community, the other makes you so obviously UNTRUSTWORTHY that you'll almost be too obvious of a suspect to actually be guilty of anything." He shrugged. "Well, other than sleeping around a bit." As he realized that that was an implication of being the town bard he added. "He's not is he? You know, sleeping around?" He asked.

"If he is, than it isn't in any of the reports." She replied. "And while his cameras have picked up on some borderline stuff. He hasn't created any porn vids yet."

"Good." The general replied. "Last thing we need is to find out that one of our operatives accidentally gave this world its first case of herpes or something."

"And yet Captain Choi is free to sleep with the princess?" She asked sarcastically.

He sighed. "This again?" He asked under his breath. "No. Not really." He answered. "But it's already happening, and trying to stop it could cause a 'Political Incident'" He said as he put up air quotes. "Plus, I would hope that the royal family does a pretty good job of keeping themselves fairly healthy, medically speaking. Besides, Choi's medical records said that he was squeaky clean, minus some asthma when he was a kid."

"Hmmmm." Was the Colonel's only response.

"Whatever." He said. "It's happening. We just have to deal with it. And hope nobody else does anything similar without at least a bit of forewarning." His phone went off. He took a moment to read it. Then he tapped in a few commands.

Her phone went off a few seconds later.

"That's me." He said. "Just forwarding you the message I just got. Apparently the young Captain found himself in the middle of a bar fight. He's okay though."

She took a deep breath before replying. "I thought the bars on his chest were supposed to make him MORE responsible."

"Oh please. It's a bar fight. Don't act like there's never been one involving an officer." He opened the door they'd reached and stepped into his office. The inside of it was oddly minimal. A simple metal desk with his computer on it, a shelf with a handful of books and binders, and a rack of challenge coins. There was a box with a large silver and white handled revolver next to the coins. But other than that the room was empty.

"It's still not a good look." She said as she stood near the door.

"In our world." He countered. "That place is medieval fantasy land. We have no idea how they view bar fights. We'll ask em during the next teleconference." He rubbed his temple with his left hand. "Hopefully

Marcos isn't the bar fight expert. If he is we might have to have some 'technical difficulties' and disconnect."

He looked at her curiously.

"Need something?" He asked.

"Not unless you do sir." She said flatly.

"Well then." He said as he lit another smoke. "Get back to whatever you need to do." He said waving towards the door.

She nodded and then turned and left the room. Once outside she took a deep breath, then headed back to the observation room.

She disliked the General.

Even worse, she knew that he was aware of it.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (90/?)

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Writer's note: WHOOO! MORE SNOW!

James is getting better at being a battle-mage. As a result the next big battle (whenever it occurs) is gonna be way more insane than the one with the grabber clan. But that's a ways off. Plus there'll be a few smaller fights before then. Just figured I'd give you a heads up before craziness occurs.

Enjoy.

\~

"PULL!" James yelled as he jumped to the side, narrowly avoiding a swing from Kela's axe. Its blade was wrapped in thick leather to keep it from being deadly. But it still hurt like hell to get hit by.

A few yards away to his right a chunk of stone and dirt rose from the ground and began to arc away from where the two of them were sparring. James rolled underneath a sideways swipe of the axe. He could feel his sword pulling his right hand towards where Veliry was standing, almost casually, and casting the spells.

His left arm shot out, and he felt the energy build up before a lance of fire magic shot out and scorched the flying wad of earth. Then he had to bring the sword up, resisting its pull, to block an overhead chop.

His training had ramped up. He was now being trained to maneuver, cast, and sword-fight simultaneously. Another aspect of the training was learning how to resist his sword's enchantment while in battle. It's mage-seeking ability was incredibly useful if he was ONLY fighting a caster. But in a brawl, or a melee, it could prove a deadly distraction if he was engaged in a fight while a caster was nearby.

Additionally; the blade didn't recognize friend or foe, it only recognized offensive magic. Meaning that if their group entered a fight and Veliry began casting spells to help him, the blade would still do everything in its power to draw him towards her. The only exception would be if another caster was targeting him directly, as it was set to pull towards the greater threat to its wielder.

Resisting the blade's desire was a herculean effort. Each time Veliry cast he could feel the blade pulling him, both trying to make his arm swing towards her AND manipulating the direction of his movements.

It had been a confusing effect at first, but he was getting the hang of working with AND against it.

"PULL!" He yelled again, as he stepped inside of Kela's current attack, ruining her aim and forcing her to back pedal to keep from being stabbed by the sheathed sword.

Another wad of earth rose up behind him. He only knew it was there because the blade tried to pull backwards, telling him that the attack was likely targeting him this time.

He smirked a bit. Then instead of trying to blast the attack with magic, he simply ducked.

Kela had managed to jump back out of the reach of his thrust, and had brought her axe back into a backhanded attack, when he did. She had just long enough to don a look of confusion at the fact that he'd almost dropped to the ground.

Then the basketball sized clump of dirt and rocks slammed into her chest.

It wasn't a hard impact, the dirt wasn't hard packed or anything, and it was only moving about as fast as a lobbed baseball. But the size and weight of the projectile meant that it was still a hell of an impact. As a result, Kela was left stumbling backwards as James charged forward to finish off the match.

He was charging in for a slash across Kela's chest plate, when suddenly the blade began to pull again, this time to the side. One of the surprise attacks that they had agreed would have to happen to keep the training realistic.

So he did the other part of the training, and instead of resisting the sword's pull, he embraced it.

He let the blade pull his arm, causing his slash to redirect at a higher angle and pull his step into a position that would have put him off foot, if he hadn't done it willingly. At the same time he drew in the energy for a different kind of spell. One that he'd only learned a few days before and was still getting the hang of.

A shimmer of red energy flowed over his left arm as it raised up, it took a position that he thought looked like a boxer blocking an incoming jab. It made sense that it did, since that was effectively what it was trying to do.

The sword bit into the flying ball of dirt and cut it in half easily. James's left arm rose up just in time to punch the lower half of the projectile into a spray of stone and dust. Then it got on in the way of the upper half and stopped it dead in its tracks. The red shimmering energy dissipated the energy of the impact well enough that James barely felt his arm be pushed back just the tiniest bit, before the projectile was flung backwards and away by the warding shield. It fell to the ground with a dull impact as James let the blade continue down to point at the ground beside him.

He smiled, happy that he'd finally gotten the warding spell figured out well enough to use in a fight.

Then he felt the firm leather that was wrapped around Kela's axe lightly rest against the back of his neck.

"Congratulations on finally getting Warding Shield figured out." Kela said smugly from behind him. "But you just lost your head."

James's shoulders sagged as he turned around to look at the grinning werewolf.

"Had to take the moment from me didn't you?" He asked, just a little annoyed.

She cocked an eyebrow as she replied. "There are no 'MOMENTS' in the heat of battle." She said in a tone that reminded him of his old Drill Sergeants. "You keep fighting until you've won, or else you die to somebody else who's fighting until THEY win." As she said the word win, she popped him on the top of his helmet with the side of her axe.

James felt the sword pull his hand, and resisted it as Veliry walked up to them.

"You did do a good job though." The small mage said as she looked at the blade cautiously. "You read the sword's intentions well and used them to your advantage. And the ward was well utilized."

"Thanks." He said as he stood up. Kela placed the head of her axe on the ground and used the handle like a cane. "I like that spell. Does the bounce back get stronger?" He asked.

"Oh yes." Veliry replied. "It's just like any other magic, it'll get stronger with you, and will act as strongly as you tell it to once you get to that point." She placed her finger on her chin. "I've even heard of people using it to send projectiles back to their source with lethal speed. But that usually takes a lot of focus, hard to do in a full on battle. Mostly that's only done in duels."

James just shrugged. "Eh, maybe some day."

Kela pulled her axe up and rested it on her shoulder. "Come on." She said. "We've got time for one more round before Gixelle is done with that stew she threw on. Let's get to it."

James walked a few yards away and raised his sword up in a fighting stance. He was still amazed at how light the blade was for being so long.

Veliry took up her spot a few yards away, then readied another attack.

"PULL!" James yelled as he rushed towards Kela.

\~

"Almost had her that last time." Gixelle said from up beside him. "Would've gotten her if your sword hadn't beaten you for her."

James didn't reply to the mockery. He didn't want to relive the last match he'd had with Kela before dinner had been served. Plus he still had the bruise on his temple to remind him of its lesson.

"How much longer before we hit the next town on the way?" He asked, changing the subject.

"Bout two days." She replied, taking the hint. "Any word from Amina?"

James pulled his phone out and checked it real quick. "Nothing today. But she said yesterday that she'd be taking off probably at the end of the week."

"Griffin?"

"Yeah. Bringing a few of the royal guard with her too. Gonna link up with her brother before catching up to us." He said.

"That'll be a fun trip in this weather." She said while gesturing to the still frosty ground around them.

"I already told her to bundle up." He joked.

"Hopefully the snow holds out just a bit longer." Gixelle said as she rubbed her hands against Maxel's ribs.

The massive drake rumbled a little with the tell tale purr that the drakes did when they warmed up for a breath attack. James felt the heat grow and placed his hands on her side too. His gloves were good and

thick, but his hands were still a little chilly. Still, the warmth of the massive creature felt great in comparison.

"I'm glad these guys keep themselves warm." He said. "On my world reptiles struggle in the winter. Some of em can kinda hibernate, but for a lot of em winter is deadly."

"Their fire saves them. They still get sluggish, and do what they can not to be active." She said. "But they survive winter just fine."

"Good." He said. "Now, anything cool at this next town?" He asked.

"Drinton?" She asked. "Not really. Bit of a hole in the wall place. Last time I was there they had a fighting tournament in one of the fields nearby. But that's only in summer, and it wasn't very impressive."

"What? Not enough people sign up or something?" He asked.

"That and none of them were very strong." She said with a hint of dissapointment. "The prize was nice. But I felt like I was taking smeplies from a gremlin."

James furrowed his eyebrows at the term. He knew what it meant. It was just one of those weird parallels this place had with Earth. One of those "close, but not quite right" things.

"Candy from a baby." he corrected.

"What?" She asked.

"It's 'taking candy from a baby', not smeplies from a gremlin." He reiterated.

"Why would you take candy from a baby?" She asked, even more confused now.

"Why would you take smeplies from a gremlin?" He countered.

"Because the little bastards use it to enhance their venom." She said incredulously. "They're not really a threat before that. But if they get some smeplie juice they can put you on your ass with one bite." She turned to face him. "Why the fuck would you take candy from a baby?"

"I wouldn't!" He assured her. "It's just the saying."

"What kind of fucked up place takes candy from babies?" She asked with disgust at the notion.

"We don't!" He assured her. "It's just a phrase!"

"Well it's a fucked up phrase." She said finally.

The two of them rode in awkward silence for a moment. Then James had to ask.

"Do you guys really have gremlins?"

"Do you not?" She asked.

"Not outside of a really campy set of Christmas movies." He replied.

"What's Christmas?"

"It's a holiday." He said. "One with a really weird history, and way too many annoying songs."

"And how do gremlins relate to it?"

"They don't." He said simply. "They really don't." He decided to change the subject. "I'mma send up a drone."

\---

Two days later when they entered Drinton, they were watched very carefully.

The people watching them didn't move to follow when they left the next day. But they did what they could to keep eyes on the group the entire time they were there. They also tried to eavesdrop on them. But they never made it obvious, and they didn't follow the group. They simply made sure that they always had someone nearby when they could. Even if it was simply keeping an eye on them through a shuttered window, or from across the street.

Orders to make a move on the "Hero" hadn't come down. For now it was simply "Observe and report". So that was what they did.

And when the party left the town, the observers gathered and wrote their report up.

After the report was written, the oldest of them pulled a key from their sleeve and wished the others farewell. He put the key into the door to their room, turned it, watched it vanish as the door glowed for a brief second.

Then they stepped through the door to carry their message.

But the older man never came back through the door. Nor did he emerge from any door anywhere else.

Ever.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (89/?)

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Writer's note: Weekend updates! W00T W00T.

That's what happens when you have a four day weekend and can actually recharge a bit.

(Jeremy Clarkson voice)

INTONIGHTSEPISODE! Kela gets some soup on her face. Amina begins a Vlog. And James moves some dirt... with his mind.

Enjoy.

\~

"Then you just add the crisped bacon bits.... and that's a clam chowder." James said to the chef of the small, lake side, cafe as he added the last ingredient to the lightly bubbling pot in front of him. "You let it simmer for a few more minutes just to let the bacon soften up, then you serve. Put some crackers or some crusty bread on the side."

The chef, a surly looking half elf named Antonea, took a spoonful of the chowder and tried it. He chewed the bit of white shell meat he'd scooped up, and savored the flavor for a moment. Then he slowly began nodding his head.

"This is really good." Antonea said after a moment. He looked at James with a grin on his face. "I was skeptical when you said that white shells could be used in a soup. Even more when you said that it was a creamy soup. But that's really good."

James tried a spoon too. After a moment of savoring it with his eyes closed, he smiled. Then he scooped some more up and held the spoon out for Kela. She accepted it, sniffed, and then ate the chowder. Her ears pressed back to her head as she let out a low "Mmmmm."

"See?" James prompted. "They are just like clams. They're just freshwater versions." He said.

Then Gixelle and Veliry moved forward for their tastes. James stood back as they did, and Antonea grabbed some bowls and spoons to serve the chowder properly.

"You said you have another recipe in mind?" The chef asked as he grabbed the bowls from nearby.

"Yeah." James replied. "But let's let this one hit the customers for a bit first. If it goes well, then I'll give you the other one on our return trip."

"That sounds good." The chef agreed as he ladled some of the chowder into the bowls. "If it does go well, and I think it will, then you lot'll always eat free."

"Sounds like a deal to me." James said.

Antonea took two bowls out to the front of the cafe and James heard him ask, "Who wants to try a new recipe?" to the customers.

"James. Thish ish sho good." Kela said with a mouth full of chowder and bread. Her reemerging snout was making it difficult to eat the soup without making a mess of herself.

James just smiled. "Glad you like it. It's one of my favorite soups back home."

\----------

A few hours, and a few more bowls of clam chowder, and the group had settled for the night. Kela and Veliry were at one of the local Inns near the lake, and James and Gixelle had a small camp set up a few miles down the shore. James had used his magic to help Steve and Maxel make their nightly den, like he had been the whole trip. The two of them were cuddling up in the dark of the massive burrow as James and Gixelle sat next to a fire, drinking ale.

After a while of sitting and relaxing she spoke up.

"I'm glad you woke back up today." She said. "You've been having a bit of a freak out since your promotion."

"Thanks for reminding me." He said sarcastically. He felt bad the second he said it, she was just trying to see how he was. "Sorry. It's just that that was kind of a huge surprise. It's also not a great sign about what they're planning for me."

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"Well...." He began. "I just went from the top of the bottom of my military's rank system, to the top of the middle." When he saw her confused look, he continued. "They gave me a rank that comes with a lot of responsibility, and usually command of a whole unit." He shook his head. "I don't like what that implies."

"What does it imply?"

"That's the worst part." He replies, shaking his head again. "I don't know. I've been racking my brain trying to figure out the purpose of it." He thinks for a moment. "The only thing I can think is that it's meant to make me feel better, which I doubt. Or it's for when they begin sending people through."

"Do you think they'll do that?" She asks in surprise.

"I know they will." James replied. "This is a whole new world, with new resources, especially magic." He glanced back toward the road they came in on. "They're probably chompin' at the bit to get the green light to send people through."

"What will they do once they get here?" She asked. "It's a one-way trip.

"Yeah." He replied. "But they also weren't supposed to be able to open the door again either. If they can manage that, they'll try to send stuff back." He looked up at the sky, drinking from his mug as he looked at the rings. "I just hope they don't follow Columbus's lead."

"Who's Columbus?" She asks.

"A bastard." He replied as he feels his phone go off in his pocket. "Ugh. Not again."

When he pulls up the screen, he sees a video message from a contact that he doesn't recognize. When he hits the play button, he's surprised to see someone he hadn't expected.

"Amina?" He asks. Gixelle looks at him curiously, then cranes her neck to see the screen. He tilts it her way a bit.

On the screen is a video of his fiancé, from an odd, off center, angle. She's messing with something beneath the camera's view.

"Oh. Look, it's me." He hears her say. She waves at the camera, then makes a funny face. James can't help but smirk a bit when he sees it.

A different voice cuts in. To James's surprise it's the voice of the General. "Ma'am, you're recording."

Amina looks down, seeming to inspect something on the screen, after a moment her face turns red. "Oops." She says. "Guess I should start then."

She looks back at the camera and smiles. Then she waves again.

"Hi James. Your people sent something through the portal. My father and your General had a rather long conversation on it. I think I like this General a lot better than I liked the other lady."

She holds up a small mirror and angles it toward the camera. In the reflection James sees what looks like a combination between a massive field supply crate and a tough book computer.

"They call it a 'Communication hub'. Anyways it's primarily meant to help us communicate with them. But they just showed me how to use it to send you video messages on it. By the way, congratulations on your promotion. The general told me all about it. I'm so happy for you."

"Ma'am you're running out of time." The General's voice interrupted. "The signal won't be able to sustain long enough. you've got about thirty seconds left."

She'd paused again and was looking at what had to be the screen. He figured there must have been some kind of translated voice to text program letting her understand the General. Smart. She knew some English now, but she was far from fluent.

"Oh. Looks like I'm almost out of time." She said once she was done reading. "I borrowed Vel's notes and translated that last bit of your note. I'm still a bit mad that that's how you left. But I just wanted to say that I lo-"

Then the video ended abruptly.

But James knew what she'd been about to say. He smiled.

He didn't even notice Gixelle's ear to ear grin as she stood up to head to her tent.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (88/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sv1i7j/wait_is_this_just_gate_87/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Short one. Had a long day of snow shoveling. Then got my ass kicked at 40k. So I'm a little exhausted. MG making more big changes.

\~

I'm a captain now. Ran through James's mind for about the millionth time since he'd heard the message the night before.

He hadn't slept. Not really. He'd eventually closed his eyes and done something sleep-adjacent. But it wasn't really sleep. It couldn't have been sleep, because when he "woke up" he'd listened to the message again. It had still said that he was a captain now.

I was a specialist. He thought, also for the millionth time. *But I'm a captain now.*

Gixelle was making a point of NOT asking him how he was doing. He was riding on Steve next to her, his knuckles white as they gripped the reins. His eyes were wide and staring ahead, rarely blinking.

Clearly, he was not doing okay.

I'm a captain now.

Ahead of them, loomed Bayton.

It wasn't the massive port city that Jadesport had been. There were no high white and dark green walls. There weren't any walls. In the brief moments of clarity when James's brain WASN'T white knuckling its way through processing his new rank, he thought that the town kind of reminded him of a small oceanside town his mom had taken him and his brother when they were teens.

But the moments of clarity were few and far between.

He did regain himself long enough to continue deploying the drones though. Gixelle was glad about that, even if she didn't completely understand the things. But it was obvious that James was running on muscle memory and not conscious thought. That was worrying.

How had this young man tamed a drake, and almost singlehandedly rescued the princess from a grabber clan, yet couldn't handle a surprise promotion? The concept confused her greatly.

Still, she figured that the best thing she could do was to just leave him to his thoughts. If he wasn't doing better tomorrow, she could slap some sense into him. Or maybe Kela could. She was a captain too, after all.

^("I'm a captain now.") She heard him mutter to himself. It wasn't the first time he'd done that. That was worrying too.

\----------

"Alright everyone." General Krick said to the control room.

The colonel stood a few steps behind him, almost hiding in the darker part of the room. She still wasn't happy about the recent change to the status quo.

"How's everything looking?" He asked.

A nearby tech piped up. "All statuses are green sir." the young woman said. "We can open the door whenever you want."

"That's what I like to hear." He said before sipping from the coffee cup in his hand. "How'd the message come out? Anyone got the annotated copy for me?" He asked.

His aide stepped forward and handed him the copy in question. He took a moment to skim over it. Then he nodded lightly.

"Alright. Just like I wrote it." He said with satisfaction. He looked at one of the techs nearby. "That's what their alphabet looks like huh?" The tech looked, surprised that they'd been the one asked, then nodded. "Kinda cool lookin'. I'll have to have the lingo folks show me some more. How's the package looking?"

"Power supply being attached and activated right now sir. Should finish spinning up a few seconds after getting there. The case is assembled and ready for ship." A different tech answered this time.

"Alright." He said, looking at the tech who'd spoken. "You got the line to it. Once they've got it set, give us a go for activation."

"Yes sir." The tech replied. After another minute or so, during which the General kept looking at the note, the tech held up a thumb. "We're good sir."

He smiled at the tech. "Alright folks. Let's drop a line to our new friends!"

The lights turned off and switched over to the dark red that they used to minimalize power draw. The device in the room below began to activate. General Krick walked forward to the observation window and watched as the first of the sparks began to swirl in the room below.

In the room below, two people dressed in hazmat suits stood in position. One of them was holding the handle to a cart, on which was a large, heavily reinforced, crate. The other tech was fiddling with a small panel on top of the crate. When they saw the portal beginning to open, the second tech hit a few more buttons, then closed the panel that went over the buttons.

Right as the portal opened fully, the tech who'd been putting on the finishing touches turned toward the window and raised up one arm with a thumbs up. General Krick returned the gesture. The tech turned toward the cart pusher and waved them forward.

The cart tech pushed it forward, past a line of yellow and black tape that had been placed on the ground in a wide circle around the portals position. The cart rolled forward smoothly, and as it got closer a ramp extended from the front of the cart. The edge of the ramp went into the opening. The tech locked the wheels, and then both of them walked forward and pushed the crate off the cart, and off the ramp, into the portal.

With one last hard shove the crate entered it completely, then they quickly retreated and began pulling the cart back. A few seconds later one of the techs in the control room spoke.

"Transmission good sir. Closing the door now."

Krick looked back with a forced smile and nodded at them. But then he looked back at the cart in the room below.

The edge of the ramp had been cut off in an arc. The edges where the ramp had been cut were smoking.

"How's it looking?" He asked without turning around.

"Still booting sir. But the energy cell is fully up and running now."

"Good." He replied. "Colonel, let's go to the conference room." He turned back to the tech. "Route the signal to there." He said as he placed the note on the edge of the observation window's sill. He smiled. "Let's go talk to our new friends."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (87/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: As far as I know, there's no precedence for something QUITE like this to happen. But whatever I'mma do what I want with the story.

Plus, big MG gotta flex the rank a bit.

Enjoy.

\~

James watched with mild boredom as the drone whizzed off into the distance as he sat next to the steadily growing camp fire.

"Drone one hundred thirty five." He said to himself. He looked at the infrared scan that the drone did at its apex. "We got what looks like a couple of wolves a few hundred yards away." He said to nobody in particular. Then he sent the drone to attach to a nearby windmill on the other side of the road. It latched onto the side of the wall and went idle.

"No worry there." Kela said as she removed her chest plate. "Between me, the griffin, and the drakes, they'll keep their distance."

"Yep." He said, not really paying attention.

It was true though. The past six days had been downright boring. The drones, he still had another six hundred and change, kept pinging random heat signatures. One time they'd noticed a cold zone, that had been the only time Kela or Gixelle had shown any concern. But nothing had bugged them. In fact, it wasn't uncommon to see the wildlife run away just from smelling them.

As a result they'd gotten fairly lax about being on guard duty. They still did it. But as long as the two, incredibly territorial, drakes were around nothing really seemed to want to come near them. Even the few travelers they'd seen had given James and Gixelle a wide berth as they rode.

"Is it wrong that I kinda wish something would attack us?" Gixelle asked, putting James's thoughts to words.

"A little?" Veliry mused. "Considering how that went last time." She shrugged. "But it has been kind of boring. James's drones flying were the only interesting thing happening, and that got old after day two."

"Well, we'll be in Bayton tomorrow." Kela added. James could tell that she was trying to sound professional. But a yawn betrayed her. "Then we get to try a few of these recipes James has."

James pulled out his phone, checking for about the hundredth time that he had screenshot the two recipes. Sure enough, there they were still.

Then he got a notification. He was surprised to see that the phone had almost two bars. He checked the tablet and saw that the people back home had sent him a message from their end. He looked at the phone and saw an audio recording.

"Hey." He said. "I got a message from my people." The others looked at him curiously. "Wonder what that's about?"

He unlocked the phone and pulled it up. Then he hit the play button.

>Good afternoon Specialist Choi.
>
>We haven't spoken before but I'm Major General Johnathon Krick.
>
>As I'm sure you've guessed before; the "Situation" you're in is of great interest to the higher ups of the government. As such I've been monitoring your situation while I've been traveling around. Now that I've managed to catch up on all that nonsense I've taken direct control of the facilities here on Earth.
>
>As I've been monitoring the situation, I've also noticed a sort of... disconnect, between you and the leadership back here.
>
>I want you to know, here and now, that I'm going to do what I can to alleviate all that.
>
>Being where you are, has occurred through no fault of your own. From what I've seen from your reports, you have not only managed to survive an incredibly unprecedented, and I'm sure terrifying, scenario. So I want to congratulate you.
>
>However, as I'm sure you're aware, congratulations rarely come without additional duties to follow when you're in the Army. Sadly, that's going to be the case here.
>
>As such, I've been speaking with other members of the "powers that be" so to speak. And we've come to an agreement on something that needs to occur.
>

>Specialist James Choi. The Secretary of the Army has reposed special trust and confidence in the

James's heart jumped into his throat as he heard the words he'd heard at numerous promotion ceremonies before. His eyes widened.

What the fuck? Is he really? He thought. Then he went back to listening.

>However, due to special, and downright unbelievable, circumstances, an even more beneficial rank is being bestowed. Due to the nature of your current situation, and the fact that you are currently the only representative of the United States Army on an entire world. As well as the apparently violent world you've found yourself in. You are hereby being granted a Battlefield Commission.

WHAT THE FUCK?!?!

>You are thereby promoted from the rank of Specialist, to the rank of Captain

"CAPTAIN!?!" He shouted.

The other members of the group had already been looking at him with curiosity. They couldn't understand the General's words. But they could understand James. Now they exchanged looks of concern.

>This advancement is effective seventeen November twenty forty eight. With a date of rank of seventeen November, twenty forty eight.
>
>Signed, Johnathon Isaac Krick, Major General, commanding.

James sat, staring at the phone. Not really hearing anything that the General continued to say. He knew that it was some kind of congratulations. He also thought he heard something about his mom. He would have to listen to the message again later.

"James?" Kela asked as she gently shook his shoulder. "What's going on?"

James stared into the space beyond his phone. What had just happened? Had it really happened? It couldn't. Could it? No. Even a General couldn't just MAKE someone a Captain out of nowhere. That wasn't a thing. Was it?

"I just got promoted." He said softly. The sound of his voice startled him. Had he just gotten promoted? Really?

"Congratulations." Kela said. Gixelle and Veliry were nodding and smiling. "But why did you yell out 'Captain'?"

"Because that's what I've just been promoted to?" He said, though it came out as a question.

"Is that... not a good thing?" She asked, confused at the concern on his face.

He looked at her. Face still a mask of shock.

"I kind of doubt it." He said with a mixture of confusion and fear.

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The colonel gritted her teeth as she heard the General finish the message and then hit the send button.

They were sitting in her office now. His aide standing near the door. But he was sitting behind her desk, and she was sitting on one of the small chairs in front of it.

It was a power play, and as a Colonel to his Major General, it was one she couldn't really do anything about.

The General slid the tablet across the desk and then pulled a metal box out of his chest pocket. He opened it and pulled a long white paper-wrapped cylinder from it. A click from the box caused a small electric arc to form near the corner, and he lit the end of it as he placed it in his mouth.

"Sorry if you don't like the smell." He said as he inhaled deeply. "Caff-CBD cigarettes. Got hooked on em during the war. Gaining rank, and getting old, has only made em harder to quit." he said with a hint of remorse.

She watched silently as he took a few drags and let out the minty smelling smoke.

"Do you know what a mustang is Colonel?" He asked as he tapped the ash out.

"What you just made CAPTAIN Choi, sir?" She replied icily.

He nodded, eyebrows arching slightly. "Correct." He replied. "It's also what I am." He added as he leaned back a bit in HER chair. "And just like Mister Choi, I got mine from a battlefield commission." He held up the cigarette. "Right around the same time I got into these things."

She didn't say anything.

"Unlike Choi though. Mine was an actual battlefield. His is more a status symbol than anything else. Although he's only about a semester away from being able to make his legit." He admitted before taking another puff.

The two of them sat in awkward silence for a moment.

"I want you to know Colonel." He began after a while. "I actually DO, approve of how you've run this place. And while I don't AGREE with how you've been treating mister Choi, I will admit that I understand it." Another puff. "Do you know why I just gave him that, admittedly rather funky, promotion just now?" He asked.

"Would I be wrong to think that it was meant to rub my nose in it, Sir?" She asked. Still icy.

He shrugged lightly. "Maybe a little." He agreed. "But it's more than that. Right now Choi IS our only SOLDIER over there. He's also our only diplomat. And he's engaged to marry a princess and GENERAL of the nation he's currently in." He let out a cloud of faintly green smoke again, puffing out a small smoke ring with the last bit of it. "Doesn't sit right with the legal nerds to have a specialist marry a general. But there's more to it than that."

Once again, she sat in silence.

"As you know." He continued. "Sooner or later we ARE going to send more troops over there." He waved the hand holding the smoke. "Not just to that little lost boys camp that Vickers set up either. But TO the castle as well." He took one last puff before snubbing the butt out in a paper cup on her desk. "Hopefully in peace. But we'll get there when we get there. When they DO get there, James Choi will be our resident expert on the area and its people. So he'll need to be in charge in both position AND rank."

"You intend for him to be the commander of whoever you send?" She asked, starting to see what he was getting at.

"We won't have many other choices, will we?" He countered. "I mean, sure Vickers will have some more knowledge by then. But he's a fuckin' ghost. Not a company commander."

"And you think a loose cannon, who's an officer only in name, will be?" She asked, one eyebrow raised.

"Again." He said. "Not many other options. Besides; who knows? Maybe a couple o' bars on his chest will finally get him to think his decisions through BEFORE he acts on them."

He stood up, gathering his tablet and the box of smokes as he did. "Besides, all the officer's pay that he'll have waiting for him should he ever manage to come home. Should make for a nice incentive to do so, as opposed to sticking around for that, admittedly smokin hot, princess."

Before she could even react, the General was across the room and out the door.

"Back to work Colonel." She heard him say as the door closed behind him.

But she took a few minutes to think before she got back up and went to the chair she was supposed to sit in.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (86/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/stbyzo/wait_is_this_just_gate_85/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Some of y'all have been waiting for this first section for a hot minute.

The General looks (and sounds) like a greyer, buzz cut, version of Jon Hamm, I have spoken.

Enjoy.

\~

The military staff of the A.P.G. Facility stood at attention, Colonel Muhhamed among them, and the civilian staff simply stood facing the new arrival to the facility.

They hadn't been warned of the newcomer's arrival until only an hour ahead of time. The Colonel had rushed to get dressed and get down to the lab before then. She'd been furious to find that nobody at the facility was even attempting to clean the place up a bit. Until she'd found out that she'd been the only one forewarned.

And now Major General Krick was walking through the control room, inspecting the setup and her personnel.

She wasn't one to sweat when brass showed up. It was just that as a Colonel she usually got some warning ahead of time.

"So." Said the General. "I've been tracking the situation here Colonel. Before I go any further, just let me give you some praise on how well all of this," He gestured at the room around him. "has progressed. I mean seriously. An extra-dimensional intrusion occurs, and within a month you already have a system figured out to send stuff back. Another month and you've replicated it in a completely different part of the world." As he said this he addressed the other staff members. "I mean seriously guys. If it wasn't so hush hush, you'd all be getting about twenty different Nobels and what not thrown at each of you. Bravo."

She tried to accept on their behalf. "Thank you si-" She began, but was cut off.

"However." he interrupted. "Based on what I've read. It's been somewhat slapdash. Not much we can do about that. New, groundbreaking, tech and all that." He sipped from a coffee cup that one of the techs had left on the desk. Then he sat on that same desk and looked right at the Colonel "And also, this whole situation with Specialist Choi, and Mr. Vickers, seems to have been somewhat sloppy."

"Sir I-" She attempted to start again.

"Stop." He said. It was such a calm and relaxed tone that she was startled into obeying.

He sipped the coffee again, then handed it to the nearby tech, who took it with a look of confusion.

"Sorry. Long trip." He apologized to them. "I hate jet lag." Then he looked back at the Colonel. "Colonel. A pair of soldiers, only one of whom had any formal combat experience, get forcibly abducted by an unknown force. One of them dies, leaving the younger, less experienced, of the two as the sole survivor. He's in parts unknown, surrounded by people he doesn't know, using technology and customs, and MAGIC" He emphasized that part with a look of amazement. "and has no idea if he's ever coming back."

"Yes we've-" She attempted to speak again.

"Stop interrupting me Colonel." He said, still as calm as ever. "I'll let you know when you can speak."

She was about to say "Yes sir." But the look on his face as he tilted his head a bit told her that was a bad idea. So instead she just nodded.

"I mean honestly. This young kid gets dropped right into a video game world and within minutes he's shot a damn werewolf in the chest." He says with a smile. "What an absolute little baller. Am I right?" He asks of the coffee holding tech. The tech just nods with a small smile.

He turns back to the Colonel.

"So tell me Colonel. Why have you been treating him like HE is the cause of the fuck up?" He holds his hand out, and after a confused look the tech hands him back the coffee. After a sip he speaks again. "I mean. This kid should be getting all the commendations for even staying alive as long as he has. He's lucky there was even breathable air over there." Another sip. "Now he's a damn dragon rider. He's scared the shit out of the locals with our weaponry. He's learning MAGIC? I mean, he said there was magic there. But I didn't really believe it until I saw that video he sent." He sips again. "And now he's somehow integrated himself into the Royal family?" He makes a show of looking at his watch. "And it's only been what.... four months? Five?" He hands the coffee back. "This kid is doing better as a diplomat than most of the people we have in foreign embassies."

He walks over to one of the aides he brought with him. The aide hands him a folder. On the front she can see Vickers' info.

"And this Vickers guy." He begins. "I actually agree with you choosing him. He seems a good fit for the mission. But he's doing some fairly wild card stuff over there." He snaps the dossier shut and looks back up. "I mean, all that counterfeit money. Plus he killed a tribe of locals, then abducted another local, and now a group of bandits?" He shrugged. "I mean, I get it. But damn. That's a lot of bloodshed over a short period

of time. Our boy Choi is doing better for our diplomatic relationships than the damn Navy SEAL."

Her jaw clenched as she resisted grinding her teeth.

"So why the hostility towards him Colonel?" He asked. After a moment of waiting awkwardly he added. "That was my way of telling you that you were free to speak."

She fought hard not to roll her eyes.

"Sir. The main issue I've had with Specialist Choi has been his tendency to act without requesting permission, or at least guidance." She said. "Several occasions of which have almost resulted in his death."

"Sounds like normal, lower enlisted, stuff to me." He said jokingly. "Is he not the highest ranking service-member in his A.O.?" The General asked.

"He is sir." She agreed.

"And his nearest superior officer is LITERALLY in a different universe and can only be communicated with via a cell phone that doesn't even have good signal?" He made it sound rhetorical, but his gestures and facial expression implied that he still wanted an answer.

"Yes sir." She agreed reluctantly.

"So." He continued. "It would make sense that he has to occasionally make command decisions on his own behalf." He gestured for the coffee again, but he just held it. "And given that he's in, what has to be the absolutely WILDEST situation that any soldier in the history of the world has ever been in, it would make sense that sometimes those decisions are somewhat insane or counterintuitive. Maybe even stupid."

"Yes sir." She said again.

"I think a little bit of leeway is understandable given his current situation. Wouldn't you?" He asked.

There was no other option she could take. He had her in a corner.

"Yes sir." She repeated one last time.

He stood up, handing the coffee back as he did. "So!" He exclaimed to everyone. "New objective everybody!" He began walking toward his aides near the door. "Priority number one! Get Specialist Choi back home, time now. Get his momma to stop worrying about her little boy." He handed Vickers' dossier back to the aide he'd gotten it from. "That's gonna be difficult, and may just have to be a long term goal since apparently he's gonna be a prince soon? Or royal consort, or whatever marrying into a royal family makes a guy. We'll play that by ear."

He pulled out his phone and began looking at some of his messages before looking back at them.

"Goal numero dos!" He continued after a moment. "Until we do have a for sure way to get him back, even if its only temporary, is to support him in any way we can. AND to enhance relationships with the kingdom he's currently in. Last thing we need is for them to become enemies or for Choi to quote unquote, Go Native, on us." He took a deep breath. "Last but not least, our final objective is to figure out whatever this weird gooey nothing stuff is and make sure that it aint a threat to our world." He shrugged and shook his head a bit. "And who knows, maybe we'll even be able to help our new 'FRIENDS' figure out how to stop it from spreading."

Almost as soon as he finished speaking he turned around and began walking. The aide nearest the door opened it for him. As he walked out of the door he added one last thing.

"Colonel. On my six." He looked back at all the techs for a moment. They were all still watching him leave. "The rest of you, get to work."

As the Colonel began walking to catch up, the rest of the staff exploded into motion.

\----------

James sneezed for about the eighth time as he rode along besides Gixelle. It had gotten to the point that even Maxel craned her long snake-like head back to look at him curiously.

"You okay?" Gixelle asked from where she sat next to him.

"Yeah." He said hesitantly as he fought not to sneeze a ninth time. "Yyyyeahi'mfine!" He blurted out before sneezing again. Luckily, he didn't feel another one coming. "Oh god. Does this place have lots of pollen?"

"Right before winter?" She asked. "I... don't think so."

"Someone musta been talking about me." He said.

"What?" She asked curiously.

"Nothing. Just one of the superstitions from my world." He said as he wiped his nose on a rag he pulled from one of his saddlebags. "Mostly a joke. It is getting colder isn't it?" He asked.

"Yes."She agreed. "I imagine we only have another month before we start getting snow."

"Hope not." He said. "That'd probably be right around when Amina starts her trip. Last thing we need is for her to freeze to death."

"I'm sure she'll be fine." Gixelle countered. "She'll be riding a griffin like Kela. She'll make much quicker time than us."

"Fair enough." He replied. But he couldn't help but still be worried for her. "Hope you're right." As he said this he pulled his leather jacket tighter, then he felt the tablet in its pocket and remembered that he still had work to do. "I'm gonna do the drone thing." He told Gixelle.

"Okay." She responded.

He got the feeling that she still didn't understand the purpose of the drones. Or maybe she just didn't care. In fairness though, she didn't really need to. Hell, he was only doing it so that his phone would still have signal. And so that the Colonel would get off his ass.

He activated the tablet's screen and pulled up the drone control program. He selected the next drone, number eighty seven, and set the drone to active. On his screen he saw the drones boot up sequence load, then a moment later he saw the video feed. He flew it over in front of Kela and Veliry, who looked at it with amusement, told the drone to "nod" at them, and then had the drone zip off into the woods nearby. The feed was in muted black and white to save energy, he could get color, or night vision, or even infrared if he wanted. But none of that was really necessary for a simple setup flight.

He had the drone fly up about a hundred feet real quick, had it run the infrared for a second as it did a visual sweep. When he didn't see anything interesting he picked a nice high tree, flew the drone just below its canopy and picked a spot for the drone to latch down. The drone attached easily, its little spike legs digging in easily. Then he set it to passive mode and put the tablet away.

With that done, taking all of ten minutes, he went back to the monotony of riding leg to leg with Gixelle.

Day four, drone eighty seven. He thought. *Back to the road trip with no leg room and no radio stations.*

This was gonna be a long trip.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (85/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sphn54/wait_is_this_just_gate_84/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Sorry I went AWOL on y'all. Wrote the sad story last week, and then I just got kinda lazy over the weekend.

James and the gang begin the trip in this one. Few more details on the logistics of the trip. Plus, Vickers manages to make some headway with his new pet.

Also, remember that bracketed \[\] speech implies that it's in the local language. You'll see what I mean by that in a minute.

Enjoy

\~

James made sure to stay with Amina the night before he had to leave. He had one of the servants take a dinner request to the kitchen for them to have some food brought up.

She surprised him when she took off her eye patch, covered her good eye, and told him to hold up a random amount of fingers. She correctly counted them every time. Even when he held them way behind him, stretching his arm out for some extra distance.

After dinner he washed up in the bathroom and discreetly chugged the single energy drink he'd managed to bring with him. He wanted to be fully awake for as long as possible. Then he made sure that their last night together was one she would remember.

\----------

He woke up before dawn, the phone vibrating silently on the nightstand next to her bed to wake him up. He reached over and deactivated it before checking that she was still asleep. Then he gently slid out from under her and placed a pillow under her head before kissing her on the forehead.

He stood and quietly put his pants and shirt back on. Before he left he sat at the table nearby and wrote her a note.

>\[Didn't want to wake you up.
>
>Heading out now, will see you whenever you get there.
>
>Don't wait too long.
>
>But don't take any unnecessary risks either.\]

He paused, thinking hard, before adding something in English.

>I love you.
>
>\-James.

With that written he stood up, and quietly walked out the door.

How the fuck did a trip to NTC turn my life into this? He wondered, though not for the first time.

\----------

Kela was waiting outside her room when he got there. His assault pack and a bottomless bag with his clothes were sitting on the floor next to her.

"Morning." She said before yawning. "Sleep well?"

Her yawn caused him to yawn before answering. "No. But it was still a good night."

"Good." She lifted his bags and held them out to him. He took them and shouldered the assault pack. "Say goodbye?"

"Not in so many words." He admitted. "But yeah. How were Jurl and the kids?" He asked. She'd spent the previous two days with them.

"Good. One of Jurl's business partners is doing some business in one of the cities on the way. He was thinking of meeting us on the way back, bringing the kids with him." She said as they began to walk.

"That'd be nice. We're supposed to be crossing some huge lake, right?" He asked, trying to remember the path that Gixelle had shown him on the map.

"We cross a delta near Lake Barnor. Not the lake itself." She replied. "Bayton is actually the city Jurl wants to meet at on the way back."

"Oh, cool. Should be nice." He said. "That's only like, a week away right?"

"Yes. It's the first big place we'll hit. We'll stop there for a break, and to make sure the drakes are okay." She answered. "I can't wait to get some of their white shells."

"White shells?" He asked.

"Small white shelled creatures that cling to the docks and ships of the lake." She replied, practically salivating. "The restaurants steam them and the meat inside them becomes absolutely delicious."

"Sounds like clams?" He said.

"Your world has them?" She asked curiously.

He pulled out his phone and pulled up a picture on the internet. "Do they look like that?" He asked as he showed her.

"Woah! Those look just like them. They just have black shells instead." She answered.

"Interesting." He said. Then he began googling something else. "Say do they make any soups out of them? Or any grain or rice dishes?" He pulled up a picture of one of the dishes and showed it to her. "Maybe a soup that looks like that?"

"Um..... No? Not that I know of anyways. They mostly just eat the white shells by themselves." She replied. "Why?"

"Oh I just think I have a few recipes that they might like." He said.

"Like the cheeseburgers?" She asked, practically licking her lips.

"Yes." He replied. "Like the cheeseburgers."

\---------------------------------

Gixelle and Veliry were waiting for them by the stables. Veliry's carriage had been fully repaired and looked good as new, though it was being pulled by a horse instead of the bird creature she;d had before, which the grabber clan had killed.

"Ready?" Gixelle asked as he got closer.

"Yeah." James replied. "Where's Artair? Isn't he coming too?"

"He is." She answered. "But he'll have to ride a day or so behind us. Maxel might kill Xhalya if she gets too close. What with Xha being a female too."

"Fair enough." He said. He didn't want to think about that too much. "So, how are we getting the two love lizards out of their den?" He asked. The two drakes had been inseparable since their fight. The only time James had seen either of them leave it was when they'd needed food or water, or to relieve themselves. Other than that, they'd become a pair of hermits together.

"Lots of food." Gixelle said simply. "Plus, you and Vel are gonna use your magic to seal up their den once they're out."

"Won't that piss them off?" He asked.

"Oh yeah." She replied simply. "But once Maxel is out, I'll be able to keep her moving. And Steve'll follow her on his own. Just mount up as fast as you can."

"Is this safe?" He asked.

"For us?" She asked. "Should be. Our drakes know that if we get hurt, they will too. So they'll keep each other in check." Then she turned to Kela and Veliry and nodded. Kela nodded and went into the stables to grab a griffin. "Those two will have to ride a mile or so ahead of us though." She leaned in and whispered in James's ear. "Their mounts are gonna be um..... well, bait essentially."

Suddenly, James felt less certain about this trip. He facepalmed and then just nodded his head.

"Alright. Whatever." He said. "Let's get this clusterfuck started before I come to my senses."

Thirty minutes, and more than a bit of hard work later, and they were officially on the road again.

James figured it wouldn't be worth the breath to complain about how close he and Gixelle were riding to each other. True to the clan mother's word, Steve basically didn't leave Maxel's side. As a result, he and Gixelle were practically riding on the same seat, their legs frequently bumping into each other as the two drakes leaned into each other as they walked.

"They're gonna be like this the whole way aren't they?" He asked.

"Yep." She answered with a large smile. "Isn't it adorable?"

"Yeah." He agreed sarcastically. "It's absolutely great."

\---

Vickers caught up to Klenan three days after his little scuffle with the bandits.

Luckily the elder merchant had managed to keep the other, surviving, bodyguard alive. He'd opened up some of his goods and used some healing supplies to keep the gut-shot man alive long enough to reach the next town. The man was now in the healer's building getting himself properly attended to. Klenan, meanwhile, had set up in the local tavern and had already begun to make deals with some of the town merchants.

Vicker's arrival caused a small bit of commotion itself. It didn't help that he was now wearing a few bits of the bandit gear. But the big draw was the makeshift loot train he pulled up on. Even more interesting to the townspeople was the contents of the cage wagon he was riding on.

The griffin had grown stronger over the three days that he'd been riding with it. He'd been feeding it from the meats that the bandits had stashed, and that he now had in the rear wagon. He'd also, very hesitantly, entered the cage and cleaned it off with a wet towel and brush.

The griffin was still weak, and still scrawny. But it would actually get up and move about every now and then, mainly to reposition itself, and it would watch him any time he moved. Occasionally it would chirp or screech at him. One time it roared in the middle of the night and he drew his pistol on reflex.

But it also didn't seem interested in attacking him either. It never struck at the bars of the cage, or attacked when he put food or water through the opening in the door. It simply watched him.

He had a feeling that it was used to people, and he had to wonder if it had been tamed before and something had simply happened to it.

Either way he intended to keep it.

Klenan welcomed him with open arms when Vickers found him at the tavern.

The broad man embraced him in a startlingly powerful hug, admitting as he did that he'd thought Vickers dead for sure when they'd ridden off.

Vickers lambasted the man. Not for abandoning him, which had been the plan for such a situation. but rather, for not sending anyone to find him once he'd gotten to town.

Klenan apologized. He admitted that getting the other guard healed had distracted him a bit, and promised a larger payment for the trip.

Then Vickers informed Klenan of the liberated goods outside in the wagon.

Klenan's eyes widened at the descriptions of some of the goods. The man practically danced when he heard about the griffin. But Vickers brought him back down to Earth when he told the merchant that he intended to keep the beast for himself. Klenan couldn't deny him that, not after what he'd been through.

Then the merchant ordered a few more ales for them and the two of them began to negotiate Vickers' cut of the money that that loot would earn.

Vickers had been right about the merchant and the loot. He smiled at the thought of all the gold he was about to earn.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (84/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/soqwu4/wait_is_this_just_gate_83/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: This one is all about shooting. This weapon does not exist as anything other than a fever dream about a weapon I wish existed. If you want a visual; Imagine a Tavor, an Ar15, and a P90 got down and dirty with each other and somehow had a kid that fired what you'll read about in a bit.

You can criticize all you want. This is my Sci-Fi/Fantasy world I get to make up whatever I want. No take backs.

Enjoy.

\~

"This glorious abomination." James began. "Is the Colt-Tavor , also known as a C.T., six point five." He said as he held the rifle in question up for the King, Kela, Amina, Veliry, and a few others to see clearly.

They were standing on one of the walls of the castle, overlooking one of the larger expanses of land that the castle had in between its two sets

of defensive walls. The next layer of wall was nearly half a mile away. Between the two of them was a large parade ground for troop formations, a few small buildings meant to hold supplies for when the troops were on their way out, and a small fighting ring.

He'd asked the king to clear the area for him so that he could demonstrate the rifle's capabilities, something he'd already gotten the green light for from command, and the king had eagerly agreed. So the wall had been emptied of guards, the empty space had been cleared of anything that was important. And a few dummies had been set up, with melons for heads, and old shields and armor on their bodies.

"This is what we call a bull-pup design." He continued, pointing at the empty magazine slot. "Meaning it gets its ammo back here in the shoulder stock. Gives you more barrel length in a smaller package, which means better accuracy." He pulled a full mag out of his vest's ammo pouch and retrieved a single bullet from the top. "It's chambered in six point five Creedmoor, hence the name. Y'all don't know what that means. But the long and short of it is that it's got big fat projectiles that can travel damn well over a thousand yards if you know how to use it."

Everyone's eyes bulged when they heard that.

"Back when I was a kid." He looked at Amina. "Back during a real bad war. The Army I'm a part of realized that with the ranges we were being engaged at, the improvements to worn armor," He gestured at his vest for emphasis. "and the ever changing battlefield. We needed a weapon that was smaller than its predecessor, but that could still engage an enemy at incredibly long distance effectively. It also needed to have enough punch left over to get through armor a little more reliably when it got there." He held the rifle up again. "So they took the manufacturers that had made their previous rifle, and borrowed some of the guys from an ally nations weapons manufacturer and made this."

He let out a long breath, then said. "And that's ripped straight from the power-point that I had to watch in basic training. I don't actually know much more beside that, because at that point I started to fall asleep."

Kela was the first to say anything. "You said it can fire over a thousand yards? Is that true?" She asked.

"Well. With the right scope and a good shooter, yeah. I think the actual range is like twelve hundred yards or something. But I don't remember, I just know that its over a thousand." He answered.

"And it still punches through armor?" The King asked this.

"The armor out there?" He asked rhetorically. "Definitely. My armor on the other hand..... maybe. Its got better odds than the old weapon that the army used to use anyways."

"How accurate is it?" Veliry this time.

"Well." He started. "That's why I asked the King to have all this set up for us." He said while gesturing to the shooting range in the yard below.

"There's no way you can hit the ones near the wall." Veliry said. It sounded like a mixture of Disbelief and a taunt.

"Well. I'm not the BEST rifleman out there." He replied. "But I still got Expert, AND they gave me a sweet inline acog." He said, while pointing at the raised bump on top of the weapon. It seemed to be built into the frame of the weapon itself, even though he knew better. "So I should be fine. Wanna see."

They all nodded eagerly. James walked up to the battlements of the wall, putting the bullet back in the mag and then slotting it in place as he walked, and braced himself in one of the openings. He pulled the charging handle back and released it with a satisfying clacking noise.

"You guys got looking glasses?" He asked without looking back. He heard them moving about, and a bit of clattering as they extended the scopes. "Oh yeah, almost forgot. Kela, you got the ear plugs, right?"

"Oh, right." She said. James heard her move around as she passed the little wads of cotton around. He placed his plugs in his ears and took up position.

"Alright, here goes." He announced. "Watch the dummy near the small door on the wall."

He gave them a moment to find the one he was talking about. Then he put his cheek to the stock and looked through the sights. As began slowly applying pressure to the trigger, he repeated the mantra that every Drill Sergeant since guns had been made, had drilled into their soldiers. And slowed his breathing.

"Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast." He said under his breath. Then, as he exhaled, he applied the last bit of pressure to the trigger.

BANG!

There was a pause. Maybe a fraction of a second. Then there was a loud CLANG! noise from the dummy's chest plate.

James adjusted, raising the barrel of the rifle just a microscopic degree higher.

He slowly squeezed again.

BANG!

Another delay. Then the dummy's melon head exploded.

James looked back to see the group staring, slack jawed, at what they were seeing.

"A little faster now." He said. "Watch the intermediate dummies. Shouldn't need the scopes to see the hits this time."

He looked back down the sights and began aiming at the dummies scattered about the open area. He also began controlling his breath even more, timing himself so that he'd fire on each exhale, just like he'd been taught.

Breath out.

BANG!

CLANG!

Breath in. Adjust to next target. Breath out.

BANG!

Splat!

Breath in. Adjust to next target. Breath out.

And the cycle repeated.

He continued for the remaining sixteen rounds, switching from target to target each time he breathed in. He missed one, the round kicking up dust behind and to the right of the melon he'd been aiming at. But other than that, every shot hit either a shield, a chest plate, or else splattered a melon head.

It only took a little over a minute.

When he was done he dropped the mag, catching it with his right hand, then he checked the chamber and flipped the safety on. He stood up and turned around, letting the rifle drop down next to his side as he looked at the others.

They were all staring at him, a mixture of awe... and fear, on their faces.

James liked the first part, and even though he didn't like the second part, he knew that it was necessary. Even if he also knew that it was probably what the Colonel wanted.

"Not bad right?" He asked, playing it cool.

"You hit every target." Veliry said.

Kela was about to correct her. But James beat her to it.

"All but one." He admitted. "But. I'm also a bit rusty. And like I said; I prefer pistols." He waved for them to follow him as he began walking toward the stairs down.

"I can fire it like that. Which is called semi-automatic, meaning only one shot each time I squeeze the trigger." He held his hand up and mocked the action. "Or I can fire in burst or full auto. Burst fires three rounds each time I fire. And full auto just keeps going until I run out of ammo." He looked back and grinned. "But we try not to do that one unless the shit hits the fan. You run out faster, it's hard to control." He flexed his right shoulder. "And it hurts like hell after a while. Bigger bullets mean more recoil, more recoil means more pain if you don't know how to handle it." He didn't mention that the rifle's built in muzzle break actually reduced the recoil a fair amount.

As he finished this bit of instruction they arrived at the door to the area beyond the wall they'd just been on. The guard nearby opened it, staring at James warily as he passed.

"How many times can you fire this weapon before running out of ammunition?" Kela asked, ever the soldier.

"Well, the average soldier carries anywhere from five to ten magazines on them when they're in the field. Plus there's usually an ammo truck somewhere nearby if you're out in the shit. I only ever carried five myself. That's a hundred rounds." He said as he made a point of opening the chamber of the rifle and looking down into it as they walked. "And a well maintained and cleaned weapon can supposedly fire a thousand before it SHOULD have any issues. But other than that, theoretically, you could keep firing until you ran dry."

They were about to near the closest of the dummies as he said this last bit. It was only about fifty yards away from where James had been firing from, and he'd hit it three times. He'd known that it was likely the first one they'd inspect. He was about to point out the bullet holes and smashed bits of melon when Veliry and Kela both rushed past him.

Veliry was inspecting the hole on the shield, and Kela was poking her finger into the one on the chest plate, while also looking at the remnants of melon that had remained on top.

"Gods." Veliry said. "It punched clean through the shield like it was nothing." She walked around behind the shield and pulled a long sliver of wood off. "Thats steel banded dark wood. An orc couldn't crack that with a mace!"

"It went right through both parts of the torso armor, front and back." Kela added. "Veliry, look at this damage on the back."

Veliry looked over, eyes wide. "It's like it exploded out of the dummy."

"Yeah." James agreed. "That's pretty accurate. The bullet hits the front plate, deforms, hits the stuff in between -a person if this was real but in this case a bag of hay and sand- deforms even more." He walked around to the back and pointed at the exit hole. "By the time it leaves it's either a bunch of pieces, or a mangled up wad of lead and copper. Either way, it also pushes a lot of the flesh out too. Leaves a big hole."

The King spoke up now. James could see how disturbed he was by this information.

"Every one of your soldiers carries one of these?" He asked.

"Well. Not EVERY soldier." He admitted with a shrug. "Doctors, and chaplains don't carry any weapon. Plus, some soldiers are equipped with different weapons. Some made for longer range, more precise shooting. Some made to fire more bullets even faster than this can. Plus C.Q.B. operations tend to require the snubby version, or shotguns." He said. "But, those are mainly reserved for the Bang Bangs. The majority of soldiers in the Army train for, and use, these."

"Interesting." The King said. "I'll have to keep that in mind."

"I'm guessing that that's what the Colonel wants sir." James said.

The King just nodded as he placed his hand to his chin.

James left him to his thoughts as he began answering questions again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/stbyzo/wait_is_this_just_gate_85/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (83/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sntmts/wait_is_this_just_gate_82/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James and Amina have their first argument as a couple. Also, other world or not; there is no escape from being voluntold.

Enjoy.

\~

Amina sat in the summoning room with Kela watching James talk to his commander. She still couldn't understand what the Colonel was saying, but she could occasionally pick up a word or two. She and James had been continuing with their slow, but steadily improving, medallion free conversations with each other every night. But she was still far from being fluent in English. Kela, meanwhile, was just sitting idly and drinking her tea.

"Yes ma'am." James said as he paced back and forth a few steps at a time. "Yes ma'am, I understand that. Yes..... No I won't ma'am, it'll be fine." He turned and paced a bit more. He'd been walking circles like this for nearly thirty minutes now. "I don't exactly have a choice ma'am. Yes, I'm certain."

James continued like this for another twenty minutes or so. Then he let out a long, deep, sigh. and concluded with, "I understand ma'am. I'll

make sure it happens." Then the phone lit up as the call disconnected from the other side. James held the phone out like it was about to attack him. Then he took a deep breath and let out another long sigh as he put it back in his pants pocket.

"What did she say?" Kela asked after a moment.

"Well." James said as he looked back up. "She's not happy. Also, this is gonna be less of a 'trip' for me, and more of an assignment."

"How do you mean?" Amina asked this time.

He looked at her and smiled. "Well with any luck, I'll be able to call home at any point during the trip. That's good at least." He pulled out and looked at his phone, reading a message that had just chimed in. "Gotta prep for another delivery to arrive. The door should open some time later tonight." He said absently.

"Well." Kela said as they all began walking toward the door. "That should give us some time to arrange the trip."

"Yeah." James replied as Amina took his hand. "Yaaaay....."

\----------

A few hours later James and Amina were sitting at the table in her room eating dinner. He was looking at articles about lizard and snake mating and birthing on his phone. He focused specifically on Komodo dragons and various vipers, since they were what Steve and Maxel most reminded him of visually. He thanked the nerds of the world for the internet.

"How'd the searches go today?" He asked as he ate a bite of smeplie. His face scrunched from the sour flavor.

"Not great." She admitted. "The shopkeep we were set to question this morning somehow conveniently went on vacation a few days ago. First one he'd gone on in years according to his neighbors." Her eyebrow raised upon noticing his face.

"Hmm, weird." He said. "Coincidence?"

"After the missing dock records the day before. And the burnt down tavern in mid-town. I'm starting to think not." She said. James just grunted acknowledgment as he hurriedly threw a pinch of salt in his mouth.

They ate in silence for a few moments. After it had grown a touch awkward James interrupted.

"You're not coming along are you?" He asked.

Amina sat for a moment, thinking, before she answered.

"No." She said sadly. "Not immediately anyways."

"Your father doesn't want you in the open now that he knows someone is trying to kill you." Less of a question than a statement.

"He won't say as much. But no." She answered.

"Gixelle says that the trip will take almost three weeks." He said. "Then it'll probably be nearly two months before Maxel lays her eggs." He rested his head on his hand and looked out the window. "Maybe three, though she doubts it. Almost six months before I'll be back."

"Yes." She agreed. "I'll be continuing to monitor the investigation. Plus I'll be overseeing the improvements to Castle security." She took a deep breath and placed a hand on his arm, shaking it lightly. "I'll try to be there before long though."

He thought for a moment, not looking at her, before saying. "I don't know that I want you to."

"What?" She asked, unsure of whether she'd heard correctly.

"I said, 'I don't know if I want you to.' Amina." He replied, looking down at her hand as he placed his other hand over it and sat up.

"But...." She began. "Why not?"

James winced a little at the hurt that he heard in her voice.

"Because I don't want you to get killed either." He replied.

"But I-" She began, but he cut her off.

"Amina I know." He said. "I know you can handle yourself. Hell I've seen you fight. I know that. And that shield is only gonna make you better. And if Danik gets your eye working then you'll be EVEN better. By the way, how is it going with Danik anyways?" He asked.

"It's good." She said, forcing a smile. "It's a little less blurry, but still not great."

"Good." He said, also smiling.

"If you know that I can handle myself than why won't you let me go?" She asked.

James exhaled, then he turned and took both her hands in his and looked her in the eyes.

"Amina." He said. "I can't LET you do anything. I'll never LET you do anything."

She looked at him in confusion, she was about to speak when he continued.

"How do I word this?" He asked himself. "I don't WANT you to go." He admitted. "I fought my ass off trying to keep you alive. Almost died

myself while doing it." He hung his head. "I don't want to be afraid like that again. But I also can't stop you from doing what you want. And I never will."

"You wouldn't?" She asked, confused again. "But you just said you don't want me to go?"

"And I don't." He agreed. "I don't want some evil shadow hit-man monster society to kill you." He looked her in the eye again. "But I'll also admit that if I'm down at this.... Clutching preserve.... or whatever Gixelle called it, and you come walking into my tent, I'll be the happiest guy in the area."

"So you do want me to go?" She asked.

"LOOK. I don't know how to explain my feelings about it, okay?" James exclaimed, then he sighed. "Amina I want you with me pretty much all the time. There's nothing I want more than for you to come with me all over this world." He shook his head lightly. "Phrasing. But still. I want you to travel with me. But I don't want you to get hurt. And I know that as a Soldier you're used to being in danger anyways. SO AM I!.... ESPECIALLY HERE!" He practically yelled. He was stressed, and talking very fast now. "But I don't want you to die. Especially if it happens in a way that I can't at least TRY to pre-"

He stopped suddenly as Amina grabbed his shirt and pulled him across the table and kissed him. After a few seconds, she pulled back and looked him in the eyes.

"I'm going." She said forcefully. "I want to. I just have to finish the investigations first..... And let my dad wind down."

"Okay." He said simply. He pulled her back down and kissed her again. "But if you end up dying I'm gonna have Veliry raise you back up so I can scold you for it." He joked.

Amina grinned. "If I die and you DON'T, then I'll haunt you." She joked right back.

As he settled back into the chair, ignoring the food that was now on his shirt, he reached out and held her hand again. "Don't make me worry too much." He said.

"I could say the same to you." She said with a devilish grin. "You seem to find trouble every time you touch a bottle." She admonished him.

James didn't tell her what he thought about her joke. He didn't tell her, that she'd haunt him whether it was literal or not.

Instead he just smiled at her, and began taking his shirt off. Bits of food scattered all over the table as he did, and he whipped the shirt towards her, resulting in a slice of smeplie hitting her on the cheek. She laughed, and the sound of her laughter drove his worries away.

But only a little bit.

\----------

Just an hour after they'd finished dinner, and while they were in bed together, an attendant had knocked on Amina's door. She'd rushed to put on a night gown, while James had wrapped up in the blankets.

James's delivery was waiting for him.

When they got there he found several large hard plastic crates, a garment bag, rucksack, and a duffel bag all waiting for him. Veliry was there with one of the other mages looking at the items curiously.

There was also, he noticed, a rifle case.

"Damn." He said as he walked up. "They went all out."

"Biggest shipment they've sent yet." Veliry said without even looking at him. "They're getting better at opening the door. It was larger than the last few times. It seemed more stable too."

"Cool." James said as he knelt by one of the plastic crates. *So they're working their way up to people sized openings.* He thought. But he kept that to himself.

He opened the crate, ignoring Veliry as she peered over his shoulder.

Inside were a bunch of small, round circles, with little propellers in the middle. The largest of them was only maybe three inches across, and the smallest was barely larger than a quarter. They all had little tiny claw-like legs on the bottom. In a slot to the side was a tablet that he knew controlled the small drones.

"Yay for work." He said sarcastically. As he did he slid over to the rifle case and opened up it. Veliry was still looking at the drones. He was thankful, since this was about to be kind of funny.

He pulled the rifle out, surprised to find that the army had splurged on getting him a brand new one, or so it seemed.

He held the rifle up in the air.

"Hey Vel." He said.

She turned and looked at him, her eyes widening a bit at the sight of the rifle in his hands.

"This is a rifle." He said with a smile.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sphn54/wait_is_this_just_gate_84/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (82/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sn3bie/wait_is_this_just_gate_81/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Another short one. Bit of info about drake pregnancy (NO. STEVE IS NOT A SHE). Also the Agency begins to maneuver.

Enjoy.

\~

"So...." Began Gixelle. "We're about to be inlaws." She said to James, who had been sitting patiently, waiting, for the past hour and a half in the mess hall. She'd insisted on bathing before doing anything else. Kela was quietly eating her lunch next to him.

"So you said." James replied. "What the hell is going on?"

Gixelle sat down. Then flexed a few times and stood back up and simply rested a knee on the bench.

"Well." She said, as she snatched a potato off of Kela's plate. The werewolf narrowed her eyes, but something in Gixelle's face made her back down a bit. Gixelle continued talking as she snacked. "Steve got Maxel all nice and fertilized. Probably happened while we were in Portview."

"And that somehow explains why, after nearly a month separated, you showed up by slamming into the side of the stables hard enough that we're going to have to have some masons inspect it?" Kela asked, clearly still upset about the potato.

"Believe me." Gixelle replied. "I didn't want to be here either." She swallowed the bit of food she'd been chewing, then signaled one of the staff to bring over the pitcher of water they were carrying. She took the whole pitcher and began drinking.

"How do you know she's pregnant?" James asked.

After a few more gulps Gixelle set the pitcher down.

"I don't. Maxel does." She bit the potato again. "Drakes can tell when they've got a clutch in the carriage. Woke up one day to find that she'd damn near uprooted the tree I had her tied down to. She'd been acting funny for a few days, so I knew something was up. But that was the big tell." She began drinking again.

"How come it took so long for her to figure it out?" James asked as he signaled for another pitcher. When the server came by he quietly asked for a plate of food for the hungry clan mother.

Gixelle belched loudly, took one more sip, and then spoke again. "Probably used some of Steve's seed that she'd held onto." She took the

last bite of the potato. "They can save the stuff for quite a while you know?"

"I didn't but okay." James replied. "So why did she bring you here?"

"It's just how they do things." As she said this the, clearly irritated, server dropped the plate of food in front of her. She began tucking in immediately, but kept talking. "When a drake gets pregnant they hunt down the mate. Then the male either becomes the female's guardian and or provider." She swallowed a bit of food. Then held up a piece of stewed beef for emphasis. "Or becomes mama's dinner while she gestates. His choice."

"Is that why you had us clear out the stables nearby and let them fight?" James asked.

He could still feel the claw and bite wounds that Maxel had inflicted on Steve when they'd let her into his pen. The two beasts had fought tooth and nail for nearly thirty minutes before Steve had submitted to the yellow variant's attacks and ushered her into his den. Luckily, drakes were more or less fireproof. But the escaping flames had been why they'd needed to clear the nearby animals out.

"Yeah. Good thing Steve's smart." She said before drinking more water. "Maxel woulda killed him if he hadn't relented. She's done it before."

"Wait. Hold up." James interjected. "You let her in there KNOWING she might have killed him?" He asked. The idea that she'd endangered Steve angered him.

"Trust me." She said, pointing her fork at him. "There was no LETTING involved. She'd have gotten in there sooner or later. And the more energy she expended doing so, the angrier she'd have been." She ate a bit more. "Besides. I knew Steve was smart. I figured that he wouldn't be dumb enough to let it get that far."

"And what if you'd been wrong?" James asked, his anger evident in his tone.

"Well I'd have felt really bad. Plus I'd have owed you a drake. We would have had to take you to one of the dens I know of and given you the option of breaking a new one." She responded.

"Oh gee. A chance to die again. That sounds awfully fair." He said sarcastically.

"Hey. I don't make the clan rules." She said. "And you do not want to get in the way of a pregnant drake."

James couldn't even comprehend the first part of that statement. He just shook his head in disbelief. After a moment he asked the obvious question.

"So." He began. "What now?"

"Well...." she began to respond. "I'm afraid we're going to have to go on the road again." She finished off the plate of food, soaking up a bit of stew with her last piece of bread. "And we're gonna have to do it as soon as we can."

James just sighed and slammed his head onto the table in front of him.

"Again?" He asked.

\----------

Vickers was having a pretty good god damn day.

He'd managed to replace the wheel on the broken cage wagon, and had also managed to convert the wagon he'd gotten it from into a sort of two wheel trailer that he attached to the back of it.

The cage's occupant had been untied easily enough. It's battered and malnourished body had kept it from attacking Vickers as he'd entered the cage to cut its restraints. He'd then placed a large pot of water and a few pig carcasses in the cage with it as he'd gone about fixing up their transportation.

The next day around noon, after the makeshift funeral pyre had gone out, Vickers was ready to move. The caged creature was beginning to show signs of life again, raising its head to drink from the pot and occasionally tear a piece of meat from one of the pigs.

Vickers took that as a good sign. Still, he knew better than to think that it was his friend. Just to be safe while they were riding, he strapped a few large shields and some canvas over the side of the cage that he would be sitting against as he rode.

Once he'd gotten the horses hooked up, and the two carts attached to each other and rolling, he set off.

He had to use the snapshot of the map he had on his tablet to navigate. But luckily he knew where Klenan was heading. He just had to hope that the old trader managed to survive that long. Especially since the only other guard had been gut-shot before they'd managed to escape. He knew Klenan had some healing gear in the cart. But he didn't know how effective magical healing was, and a gut-shot was still a terrible wound.

But still. He had a full belly, a whole bunch of liberated loot, two new wagons, and (assuming he had identified it correctly) he had a damn griffin. With any luck, he'd be able to tame the winged cat creature and ride it. He'd seen other people riding them after all.

If he could do that, he'd get to the capital in no time. And if Klenan did agree to pay him for all the loot, than he'd also do so with a nice windfall in his pocket. If not, well, that'd be fine too.

Indeed Vickers' day, and his trip, were looking better and better with every second.

As his cage/carriage/train convoy began to roll, he began to sing an old song from his grandfather's time. One he'd loved listening to anytime his family had gone on roadtrips.

"On the road again....." He began, as the cage rattled down the forest path.

\----------

Thousands of miles away, on a different continent, there is a room.

It is so far below the ground that it occasionally gets intruded upon by creatures of the deep dark, who assume that it is a long lost treasury. They never live for very long after finding it.

Its contents tend to cause that kind of attraction, for it is a hoard the likes of which any dragon would envy. Even the Petravian armory, grand and powerful as it is, doesn't compare to this place.

It's been filled, slowly, over the many millennia that intelligent life has existed in this world. Indeed it holds wonders from the dawn of time. When the gods themselves walked the grounds of the world freely.

In the center of the room stands an eerily plain table. It isn't magical, or made of any special materials, just plain, unadorned, steel.

But standing around the table, loosely forming a circle, are five doors.

While James, Kela and Gixelle are sitting and conversing, one of the doors opened.

A figure wearing a dark cloak stepped through, holding their breath as they did, and placed a single sheet of parchment on the table. Before their breath ran out they stepped back through the door.

There was no need to cover the message, or hide it, or obscure it. Nobody would ever come here that wasn't meant to. They'd die if they did.

Over the course of the next few days. the other doors opened. Just like then, hooded figures would step out of them. They'd read the message, and sometimes leave one of their own. Occasionally they would add to the hoard. But they'd always leave quickly.

The message was simple.

    Grinner has failed.
    Necromantic casting implied to have occurred afterwards.
    Assume Petravus operations compromised.
    Inform Count of failure, offer refund or additional attempts, no additional charges.
    Summoned Hero primary point of failure.

Dispatch agents to surveil him more closely.

As this message began to disseminate over the next few weeks, the Petravian soldiers began to find less and less success in their searches for the Grinnner's accomplices and hidden materiel.

And the eyes of the Agency began to look towards the summoned hero.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (81/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/skpv9h/wait_is_this_just_gate_80/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: Bit of a short one. Kinda busy today. Ask anyone who's served. Soldiers (or marines, or whatever) tell fucked up jokes.

EDIT: Fucked up the title. But I fixed it. Yaaaaay

Second edit: Fixing things broke some other things. I've fixed it once again.

\~

"God boy, have you gotten bigger?" James asked as he sat astride Steve's back. "Either you've gotten bigger, or my legs have gotten shorter. I really hope it aint the latter. I'm too short as it is."

Steve simply looked at him curiously, then huffed. His abdomen grew warmer for a moment as he exhaled.

"Hey! Hey now." James exclaimed. "None of that. I get the message, no fat jokes. But no roasting people."

Steve just kept plodding along. James was riding him through the city alongside Kela on one of the castle Griffins. Amina was attending to her duties as General and coordinating the Army's search through the city. They were checking up on some of the "backup plans" that the Grinner had revealed.

So he'd decided to take Steve for a ride. He'd checked in with Artair to get suggestions. The two of them had been training together off and on since returning from the trip north, though James had been a bit busy lately.

Artair had suggested testing Steve's training. So James had removed his muzzle before bringing him out.

People moved out of the way of the large drake and the army griffin. Little kids were staring at the two of them in awe. People were also waving, some of them even called out to James.

James disliked fame.

All he'd ever wanted to do was serve his eight years in the Army, finish his degree, MAYBE commission for a term so he could get some practical experience being a nurse, and then get out and work on the civilian side. He'd even toyed with eventually going back to college later and becoming a doctor. But he still wasn't sold on all that extra schooling. Plus, his army buddies already gave him enough "Why you no doctah yet?" jokes. He didn't mind the jokes, but there was no need to add fuel to that fire.

I'd actually kill to hear one of the guys make that joke again, played out as it is. He thought. *Be nice to hear someone from home, even if they're being racist assholes.*

"You okay James?" Kela asked from his left.

"Hmm?"

"You seemed to be deep in thought." She said. "Everything alright?"

"Yeah. Just a small moment of homesickness for something dumb." He replied.

"Ah. What about?" She asked.

"Eh, I just thought about how weird it is that I'm kinda..... famous." He said as he waved at one of the townsfolk, a redheaded orc carrying a barrel full of ale. "That led to me thinking about how I'd THOUGHT my life was gonna go. Then I started missing some of the dumbass jokes some of my boys used to make."

"Ah, I see. What kind of jokes?"

He let out a single quick laugh. "The racist kind."

"Hmmm. I know all about those." She said with a grin.

"Yeah?"

"Of course." She replied. "Lots of jokes about being a werewolf. Jokes about chasing squirrels, licking...things. Oddly, lots of people joke about hairballs. Even though I'm not a Felinian."

"Felinian?" He wondered.

"Cat people." She replied simply.

"I figured." He said. "I thought werewolves were common? Or, you know, common enough."

"We are." She agreed. "But people use whatever they can to separate themselves from other people. And bored soldiers will joke about damn near anything. Especially during extended duties."

"True enough on all accounts." He agreed.

The two of them sat in silence for a moment as they thought about the jokes their friends had made, sometimes at their expense. After a moment James asked a question that had been bugging him since she'd mentioned it.

"You don't..... chase squirrels.... do you?" He asked.

"Believe it or not. As children it's very difficult for us werewolves NOT to chase them." She admitted. "The instructors in our army training actually use them to test our discipline when we're trying to earn our officer's ranks."

"Really?" He asked incredulously. He tried not to laugh at the idea. "How.... How do they do that?"

"Well, when we're at the apex of our wolf transformation, they'll have us stand at attention in formation." She began.

"Yeah?" He replied. His control was already slipping at what he somehow knew was coming. The Army had their own version of testing Military Baring and discipline.

"Then they begin asking us questions." She continued, ignoring his stifled laughter. "Things like appropriate marching calls, rank designations, weapon capabilities. Things like that."

"Uh huh." James was practically shaking.

"Then they slowly but surely begin releasing squirrels. Just a few at first. But as they continue, more and more are added. Bread and nuts are scattered to make them move about a bit more."

"Yeah?" He was losing his fight. Kela was biting her lip a little to avoid snapping at him.

"If you move. Even if it's just turning your head to watch the squirrels. You fail." She said at last.

"How many times...." James inhaled deeply, fighting the laughter. "How many times did you have to do that test before you passed?" He asked.

"I'd rather not talk about it." She said, cheeks flushing red.

"Oh come on." He encouraged her. Steve looked back, confused at James's shaking. "Come oooonnn! How many times Kel?"

Kela looked away. ^("Eight.") She mumbled.

"I'm sorry? What was that?" James asked.

"I said eight!" She snapped. "It took eight tries!"

James lost control at the thought of the armored werewolf going "SQUIRREL!" as her head cocked to the side to follow one of the small creatures. He began full on belly laughing.

Kela just rode in silence, chewing her lip, doing everything she could not to react.

Eventually she lost control too.

"IT'S NOT AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS!!!" She yelled, causing some of the townspeople to turn and look in curiosity.

James paused his laughter for a moment. "But eight times though?" Then he started up again.

As angry as it made her, Kela couldn't deny the ridiculousness of it either. After a few moments she couldn't help but release a short burst of laughter as well.

"Gods damn it." She said as they both began to calm back down.

"Hehehe. You gotta let me go to one of those tests." James said before trying to get his breath back.

"Not a chance!" She said as she kicked her griffin into flight. "Keep up, you ass!" She yelled as the feathered beast took to the air.

"Oh game on!" James replied. Then he patted Steve on the side of the neck. Steve broke away from watching the griffin to look at him curiously. "Alright boy. Let's lose some of this extra padding you've got. CHASE THE FLYING SQUIRREL!" He yelled, loud enough that Kela was sure to have heard it.

Steve didn't need to be told twice.

\----------

James and Kela were still shit talking when they returned from their little chase through the city several hours later.

James had ridden the massive drake hard, and Steve was eager to return to the den in his pen. The second the gate opened the drake rushed in and attempted to crawl into the burrowed space. James had to hold his reigns in order to keep him back long enough to remove the saddle. Once he did the massive lizard practically shot into the dark space and curled up.

James shook his head at the drake's sometimes cat-like love of small dark spaces. Instead of worrying about it he simply grabbed a goat carcass and threw it near the entrance. Steve's head shot out quickly and snapped at the meal, quickly dragging it into the dark.

"Don't make a mess ya turd!" James admonished. "I don't wanna clean goat out of your fur." But he could already hear the wet crunches that told him Steve was already devouring the carcass.

Suddenly there was an impact on the outside of the pen. It was loud enough and large enough that James instinctively dove to the ground.

"What the fuck?" He asked as he peaked back around the stone partition wall. Several of the stable hands were also peaking out from where they were. Kela, who'd been walking towards him after turning in her griffin, stood in the middle of the central hall looking at him curiously, head cocked at an angle.

When he looked he saw something that, despite it's familiarity, didn't make any sense given the context.

"Maxel?" He asked. Then he heard a whimpering noise from Steve's den. "Steve?"

The large yellow and green-speckled drake was apparently clinging to the exterior wall of Steve's pen, up above the closed in cage exit that allowed him to go outside. She was staring intently down at the entrance to Steve's den through the small caged window up above, and breathing rapidly.

Even by massive-killer-lizard-dragon standards, Maxel looked absolutely insane.

Then James saw someone else familiar pop up in the window.

"Gixelle?" Kela asked from where she'd joined him near the pen.

"Hey guys." She said, looking wearier than even after the battle with the grabbers.

"What's goin on?" James asked. "Why do you look like you've been rode hard and put away wet?"

"Cause I've ridden hard, for almost a week now. And here I am." She replied. "We need to talk about our drakes."

James heard Steve whimper again.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sntmts/wait_is_this_just_gate_82/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (80/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sk7be1/wait_is_this_just_gate_79/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: My first ever chapter with ZERO James's POV's.

This is gonna have to happen from time to time in order to flesh out the other players in the game.

(Jeremy Clarkson voice.)

In tonight's episode; An officer gets a call from a ghost. Vickers lights a fire. And James sends a text.

Enjoy.

\~

Colonel Muhammed was busy reviewing the data on the recent transmittal issues. There were a few different bugs that had popped up, transmitting two people and a bunch of gear had required that they keep the door open for almost five minutes. That length of time had caused issues. They'd actually had to draw from the sub's reactor to keep up.

But it was all details.

The message she'd gotten from the other side the day before was concerning. Chief Vickers' trip being sidetracked was a nuisance. But she knew that the operative would be able handle himself. If a wheel mechanic and nursing student with no deployments to his name could accomplish everything HE had. Then she had to trust that an actual Navy S.E.A.L. could do even better. Hell, he was already making progress in multiple departments of intel gathering.

It was as she was thinking this that she was forwarded a new message from the Specialist.

>New intel on this world's society Ma'am.
>
>There was an assassination attempt on the princess during the banquet.
>
>Luckily I managed to stop it from succeeding. Only minimal injuries obtained.
>
>Two main points:
>
>1- There's a very rare race of "people" in this world called changelings. Capable of stealing body parts for their own use. Can look like anyone, and go just about anywhere. Very hard to kill. Headshots = easiest way to put down.
>
>2- There is a clandestine society known as 'The Agency' I thought of the CIA at first, they're different though. According to what I've been told they're like every governments version of the boogeyman here. Think ILLUMINATI status, only for hire? Don't understand that part. but everyone seems spooked by them.
>

>The king has dispatched investigators to track the assassin's movements before they died. Plus apparently the guy had a lot of aces up his sleeve.
>
>Will keep updated on further developments. But changelings may be an issue if you guys ever think of bringing people back through the gate your way. You know, besides me. Hopefully.
>
>\-SPC Choi.
>
>PS: Can you guys send me my dress uniform whenever it's convenient. I had one mocked up by the local tailors. But it got torn up during the attack. Plus they look better with their ribbons and patches.
>
>PPS: I have a dope new sword. It's magical. Will send you a video of how it works once I figure out how it works.

She read the message. Then reread the message.

She couldn't deny that it was good intel. She knew a few people in D.C. who would love to get some changelings on the payroll. But Choi also had it right that they were obviously a major threat as well.

What was more worrying was the presence of this "Agency". She had to admit that reading the word had immediately brought the C.I.A. to mind. The fact that Choi had described them as being akin to an Illuminati for hire, was concerning. The Illuminati might have been a myth (or at least she hoped it was) but the concept of this other world actually having a parallel was a problem.

She also couldn't rule out the idea of the C.I.A. actually having a presence on another world. She knew the odds were insanely low that that was the case. After all, she had to assume that someone higher up would have at least brought in a consultant if they had anything similar going on somewhere else. Or at least she hoped they would.

Still, she had to check just to make sure.

She was about to call an old "friend", a contact who was in the C.I.A. But as she began to scroll through her phone's contacts to make the call. It began to ring.

What are the odds of that? She thought. *Bastard's ears must've been burning.*

She tapped the green button on her screen.

"What do you know?" She said. "I was just about to call you. I have some..... *interesting* questions that I was hoping you could answer. Or at least FIND answers for."

She paused for a moment as the person on the other end spoke.

"Well of course." She answered. "Aren't all of our conversations hypothetical?"

\----------

Vickers sat behind bush near the bandit camp, watching them mill about as they prepared for a counter attack.

He'd arrived just in time to see the fleeing bandit, whose tracks he'd followed, arrive and tell them about what had happened. The bandit in question looked human enough. But he had a swollen left foot, explaining the odd tracks, and had pointed ears almost like an elf. He saw, but couldn't hear, the bandit explaining how they'd ambushed the carriage, and how Vickers had killed the three other bandits.

He didn't see any gestures that indicated that the hobbled bandit had noticed he was being pursued. That was good.

What was better was the fact that Vickers saw several horses, not very good looking horses but horses, tied to some of the nearby trees. He also saw something on the far side of the camp. It was in a large, seemingly scrap-built cage, and appeared to be tied up. But it was big.

Now the leader of the camp, a large insanely muscular (even compared to Vickers) human with a pair of massive battleaxes on his back, was barking orders. The other members were moving about grabbing their weapons and gear. Several began to untie horses.

That was Vickers' cue.

He stepped out of the bushes, shield on his left arm. But his sword was sheathed on his hip.

"Well hello there everyone!" He exclaimed as he emerged from the bushes.

The entire camp froze and stared at him. One bandit, a guard that Vickers had actually been amazed hadn't seen him before, began rushing towards him. Vickers swung the shield out and slammed it into the man's face.

There was a bright flare of orange light. Then the man flew backwards screaming, and clawing at his burned face. Vickers had wondered if the shield would do that if it hit a person, now he knew.

"That looks painful." He said, as he looked back at the bandit leader.

"You're the one that Limpy told us about." The large man said, gesturing to the bandit Vickers had followed.

"Sure am." Vickers said coolly.

"You got a lot o' nerve comin' here after what you did to Garet, Shim, and Far Tusk." The bandit siad.

"Yeah well. They shouldn't have killed my traveling companions." Vickers replied. He calmly watched as the other members of the camp began to spread out around him, hands moving to weapons. "Fair's fair, right?"

"Yeah. Suppose so." Said the large man. "Why're you here? Want revenge? We aint got none o' your stuff."

"Oh. Nah." Vickers replied. "I'll take a horse though."

The large man began to laugh. After a few moments so did the rest of the camp. Even Vickers joined in.

Once it died down a bit Vickers spoke again. "I got payment if you want. A trade, if you will."

"Yeah? Whatcha gonna give me. That fancy shield o' yours."

"Actually, something a bit better." Vickers began reaching into his jacket. The bandits tensed a little, until they saw that he wasn't touching his sword.

"Yeah? Got some gold?" A different bandit asked.

Vickers shook his head a bit. "I do." He answered. "But that aint what I'm offering. But how bout some lead?"

The bandits began murmuring in confusion. Vickers drew his pistol and began attaching the suppressor. The bandits watched him curiously.

"Why the hell would we want lead?" The leader asked, confusion evident on his face. "Can't do nothing' with lead."

"You can't?" Vickers asked, mocking confusion at the idea. "Weird. Well, I definitely can."

Before any of the bandits could react there was a loud pop. Several of them flinched. One of the bandits behind the leader was splattered with bits of brain, skull, and scalp.

The bandit leader lived, or at least his nerves fired, just long enough to instinctively reach up over his shoulder for an axe. Then he fell over backwards onto a crate, smashing it with his immense bulk. All the bandits stared in awe at the dead body of the man who'd lead them through a combination of fear and battle skill.

Then there was another loud pop, and one of the bandits who had been edging around Vickers fell to the ground clutching their throat. Blood poured out around their fingers.

Some of the bandits broke and began running away. But just enough of them stayed that Vickers had to go to work.

Too bad they're a bunch of fuckin amateurs. He thought as one of them swung a hammer at him. His shield blocked it, flared, and sent the hammer burning into the dwarf's chest with a sickening crunch.

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Ten minutes later. Vickers stood over the pile of corpses, twelve in total, and had finished stacking the camps remaining firewood over them. He chewed on a bit of meat that they'd been roasting when he'd gotten there as he watched the fire begin to catch on some of the logs. He also had a significantly heavier purse on his waist than when he'd started the day.

He also had some... liberated.... goods that the bandits had been storing up. Mostly food and liquor. But there were a couple decent weapons and other things. Plus one painting that he questioned the origin of. He had a feeling that Klenan would have no issue selling any of it as part of his wares. Who knew, maybe Vickers could even get a kick back from it.

What was more important, was that Vickers had acquired horses. Five of them were in good enough condition to ride long distance, even though he hated the idea. The other three he untied and sent on their way, after liberating them of their bags and saddles. He didn't like horses, but he could at least let em run free.

What was most interesting was the contents of the cage. He'd though it was a slapped together scrap job. But upon further inspection he realized that it was simply beaten up. It had spots on it where axles and wheels could be attached for travel, but one of the wheels was broken, and it looked like the bandits had been trying to repair it.

Inside the cage, bound and muzzled by some rope, was a large creature that really truly reminded Vickers of what kind of world he was in. It was almost as large as the horses. It had claws and a head like an eagle. But the back legs and rump were like a black panther. It was clear that the thing had been abused by the bandits. It also looked like it was malnourished.

But Vickers had an idea that this thing might just be the answer to all his problems.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (79/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sj2or8/wait_is_this_just_gate_78/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: Rough day of stomach problems. Hence the lateness, and the shortness of this chapter. Don't trust three-day old chili.

Enjoy.

\~

"You ready?" Amina asked as her hand began to glow red.

James gripped his new sword in both hands and nodded his head. It was vibrating its warning to him about what he already knew was happening. It was also subtly pulling toward Amina.

"Alright." She said. "Remember; I'm not aiming at you. I'm aiming at the dummy."

"Got it." He said. "Lemme know when."

He hands glowed brighter. After a few moments she warned him. "Now!'

A bright lance of flame shot forth from her hand. It was the same flame spell that James knew, he knew that, but she was years ahead of him in experience. He'd only barely managed to make a short-range flamethrower. She was shooting goddam tracer rounds.

James almost missed the projectile; it was so fast. But the sword seemed to almost WANT to intercept it. He felt his hands and arms aching to go towards it. He knew from the description he'd been given of the Mages Blade that that was what it was supposed to do. So, he let it lead him as he swung to intercept.

Even still, the fiery projectile almost got past.

But it didn't.

He expected the sword to recoil. To hear a loud ringing noise from the impact. Hell, he'd expected the sword to get knocked out of his hand once he'd seen how fast Amina's fire spell was.

That didn't happen.

The blade caught the firebolt just as it was barely past his position. The second the blade tasted the magical flame it seemed to leap forward. The brightness of the shot disappeared immediately, and James was accidentally pulled into a continuation of his swing. It caused him to overstep and end up off balance. It also caused the sword to swing into the ground, where it began burning the patch of grass it had hit.

James looked down, surprised to see that the sword was glowing with heat. As he regained his footing, he reached his left hand down and could feel the heat radiating off of the blade. But the handle, only inches away, was as cool to the touch as ever.

"Did you feel it pull?" She asked.

"Yeah." He answered. "Honestly, it was the only reason I even connected with your shot."

"I figured as much." She responded. "That's the blade doing its job. It also tries to lead you toward the spells caster." She raised her hand, and it began to glow again. "I'm going to do a volley of three. Remember what it felt like. Use the footwork we've taught you to flow WITH the blade. Follow it's guidance. You'll see what I mean."

"You say that as if you've used this blade before?"

"I've wanted to." She admitted. "Hell, any swordsman who's ever fought a caster has wanted a sword like that." She focused on her hand again. "Ready?"

James set his feet again, gripping the still warm sword. Then nodded.

"Same spot!" She announced as her hand flared again. "Now."

Another lance of light. James followed the blade this time. He'd forgotten to move out of the way, so Amina's warning meant the shot was coming dead at him.

But this time he was ready for the speed.

The blade rose up in a sidelong slash and intercepted the shot neatly. He stepped forward as the blade carried past to his off hand. He pivoted, felt the blade resist for just a moment, then felt it follow his move. Then it pulled his hands again, leading him into the spin even faster than before.

He brought the blade back around just in time to intercept the second shot. This one had been aimed at his shoulder instead of his chest. The blade ate the magic flame greedily, and afterwards James could actually feel the heat of the metal as it neared the side of his leg. If it was hot before, then it was scorching now.

The blade reversed quickly as James took another step forward. It rose in an almost completely vertical upward slice. It caught the third and final attack almost dead level with James's face. James took another step as the sword tried to bring itself down into a vertical chop.

As he looked down he realized that he'd somehow closed the distance with Amina almost entirely. She was staring him in the face from only a yard away now. His current attack was in line to chop through her right shoulder. The one she'd been using to send attacks at him. She was oddly calm given her current situation.

When did I move this far? He thought to himself. *Oh god, I need to stop the swing!*

But he couldn't. Between the energy the blade had drank up, and his momentum, he was moving too fast. And the blade was too hungry. Even if he released the blade from his hands entirely, the sword would still end up hitting her.

He was opening his mouth to warn her when there was a light blue blur in front of him, and between the two of them.

CLANG!!!!

James felt the reverberation travel up his arm. His hands almost released the sword from the shock of the impact. But the sword was still trying to continue its swing.

Between James and Amina was the light blue of the Spirit Shield that was attached to Amina's left arm. Between her own natural speed and the Shield's own semi-sentience, she'd managed to stop the strike.

And now the two relics were locked in a match of strength. The shield held Amina's arm in place and shook from the force that the sword was trying to bring to bear. Meanwhile the sword clattered against it, still vibrating, and almost red hot from the absorbed fire.

After a moment of struggling, James managed to pull the sword out of its attack. It felt like trying to pull a magnet off of another magnet. But Amina seemed to pull back almost effortlessly. Once he'd gotten a few steps back James plunged the sword into the dirt. It sizzled and shook as it attempted to emerge. But James held it firmly, and after a few moments the sword calmed down, and cooled down.

"What the hell was that?" He asked, surprised to find himself winded. "How the hell did I get all the way over here?"

Amina flexed her shield arm as she answered. "That was the sword. I told you to flow with it for a reason. Every time you took a step you practically leaped forward with it." She put the shield down, resting it against her leg, then she pulled her arm across her chest. "That's what it's designed to do. Helps you close the distance with your attacker. Gods abound, I need to work on my shield arm. Damn thing almost pulled it out of socket."

"Are you okay?" He asked as he slowly drew the sword out of the ground and inspected it. It was cooling rapidly. "For a second I thought I was about to take your arm off. Now it turns out your shield almost did the job for me."

"Looks like we both need to practice. Though I'll probably need to back up a bit further. Even I didn't know the sword was that aggressive." She admitted.

James stood up and sheathed the sword on his back.

"Let's put that on hold for a bit." He said as he pointed at their new observer. "Looks like they got some info."

Veliry was leaning against the wall of the castle nearby, looking at them. James thought she looked like she'd just emerged from a mosh pit. When she saw James looking at her, she motioned for them to follow her, then began slowly trudging back inside.

"She looks like hell." He said as he stepped next to Amina.

"She went through it last night." She replied.

\----------

"It WAS the grinner." Veliry said from her seat in the king's audience chamber. Nearby, Marcos sat in his own seat. He looked even worse than Veliry did. "Nine hundred eighty-three years of travelling the world and killing whenever it felt like it." She continued, hands shaking as she raised a cup of tea to her lips and sipped. "And you ended all of it with two shots from your pistol."

"First off." He began. "Are you okay Vel?" He asked from where he sat next to Amina. "Second; you guys have called this thing 'The Grinner' twice now. Who the hell is the Grinner?"

"I'm fine." Vel replied, even as her head rested against the desk in front of her. "Necromancy just takes a lot out of you. And he was very strong. He resisted." She shook her head subtly. "We lost two of our mages trying to hold it down. Marcos almost broke too."

Marcos stirred at the sound of his name. But he didn't respond. James recognized the look of someone traumatized. Marcos looked like some of the old war vets he'd helped take care of during his volunteer hours at assisted living facilities on Earth.

"The Grinner." Kela began from where she was standing next to the king. "Is a legend of an assassin. The blonde hair was the giveaway for Amina and I. But the... interview... that was conducted last night confirmed it."

"That big of a deal?" He asked.

"Yes." Amina answered this time. "We've got records of him carrying out hits all over the world for centuries now. We'd always suspected that he was a changeling. Not many other ways to explain the longevity AND the ability to appear seemingly anywhere."

"Indeed." Kela continued. "We've already started sending out investigative agents to track his path. But we've also got a report from General Sigbert. He's reported several missing soldiers since he returned to his camp. We've sent orders to question the rest of his troops. But it's safe to assume that it was probably the grinner."

"How did he get so close?" James asked. "I mean. He was right outside the castle window."

"He was behind the unexpected sickness at the camp the day we left." Veliry answered. "He used the confusion and a stolen uniform to get right into our party's escort."

The thought of that.... thing... being so close to them, so close to Amina, angered James.

Amina seemed oddly unsurprised by the idea. He looked at her with concern. She noticed and shook her head.

"Stuff like that isn't a surprise when a changeling is involved." She whispered to him. "I'll bring some past reports to you later. You'd be amazed what they're capable of."

Still, James didn't like the idea of how close they'd been.

"Why didn't it kill her then?" He asked. "She WAS the target, wasn't she?"

Veliry sat back up and drank more of the tea as she nodded. "She was. But he was asked to make it as impactful as possible. That's why he did it at the banquet. He only really cared that King Farrick be present for the kill. But he thought the banquet would make an even better show."

"It was a SHOW to him?" James asked, suddenly angry again.

"I got the sense, from our.... talk, that a lot of what the Grinner did was just for the sake of making a show of things." She said, before shuddering. "It took a lot of pride in killing. A lot of joy." She took another shaky sip.

"What broke the ritual?" Kela asked, changing the subject unexpectedly.

James looked to Amina curiously. "What question cause the ritual to burn out the target's soul?" She replied, whispering again.

He just nodded and pretended that he'd known that.

"We asked him if he'd set any contingency plans up for afterwards." Marcos said, surprising everyone. His voice was shaky. He was still staring off into the distance.

"What?" James asked. "Like.... his escape plan?"

"That was the intention of the question." Veliry answered.

"And that broke the ritual?" Amina asked incredulously.

"No. We did." Veliry answered. "We had to stop him from talking."

"Why?" For the first time since James had entered, the King spoke from his centrally located seat.

"Because. My king." Marcos replied. "He was listing off ALL of his contingency plans." Everyone in the room stared at the elder mage. "We had to release his soul after he'd been speaking, listing, his plans out for over twenty minutes. Because it didn't seem like he was going to stop

any time soon. And we were the ones that were running out of control of the ritual."

Veliry nodded gravely. "It was a very long list." She looked at the king. "And more than a few of them were set here in the capital."

James was about to ask what they were going to do. But the King spoke first.

"Who hired him?" King Farrick asked. "Who wanted my daughter dead."

Veliry nodded. She'd known that question was coming. Hell, it'd been half the reason they'd even done the ritual.

"The Agency." She replied.

How the fuck did the C.I.A. get here already? James asked himself. It was just a little internal joke to help him stay relaxed.

The gasps and widened eyes of the other people in the room, were not.

"Fuck." Kela said under her breath.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/skpv9h/wait_is_this_just_gate_80/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (78/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/si9vpx/wait_is_this_just_gate_77/) /
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James woke up coated in sweat. He'd had a nightmare about the assassin. It had been chasing and attacking him in it's splayed out, multi-limbed form. And just like any nightmare, James's evasions and attacks had been all but useless against it.

But that wasn't what had woken him up.

There was a clattering and humming noise coming from the corner of Amina's bedroom. He looked and saw her new shield hanging from its rack. It was bouncing up and down against the wall as if it was trying to jump off its hooks. Below it James's new sword, the Mage's Blade, had fallen over and was slowly sliding across the ground. It reminded him of how his phone would slide if it was on vibrate mode and someone called. Then he realized that that was exactly what was happening.

He was about to get out of bed and grab them when he felt a hand grab his shoulder. In his focus on the misbehaving relics he'd almost forgotten that Amina was in bed with him. He jumped a bit as a result.

"It's just me." She said, as she pulled him back down towards her.

"What's going on?" He asked, still looking at the shield jumping in place.

"The mages are performing necromancy." She said quietly. "You had nightmares didn't you?"

He turned back and saw that she had the same cold sweat he did. "Yeah. You too huh?" She nodded. "Does necromancy always cause nightmares?"

"For anyone who isn't performing it, yes." She said. "Come back down. We can still get some rest."

"What are the sword and shield doing?"

"The shield is trying to protect me, and by extension you." She replied. "And your sword is detecting the flow of the magical energy being drawn in. It's trying to warn you of danger."

"So there is danger then?" He asked.

"With necromancy? Always." She answered as he finally let her pull him in.

She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him just behind his ear. Under other circumstances, James would have been incredibly turned on by that. He would have pulled on her arms and legs, drawing her in even closer, and told her to do it again.

But the rattling and humming of the two armaments drew his gaze back to them. Learning magic had taught him to sense the same energies that his sword was picking up on. He could feel the dark magic flowing through the castle.

Amina could too. So she hugged him tighter.

Neither of them slept the rest of the night. Instead, they waited for the terrible feeling to pass. But it didn't do so until the sun was already beginning to peak over the edge of the horizon.

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Vickers grunted as he and the other guard, a deaf Hisstian who's name was all but unpronounceable, shouldered the fallen tree that had blocked the path in front of them. It wasn't overly heavy, but it was long enough that it was easier this way.

They'd made good time on their trip so far. They'd traveled nearly one hundred and fifty miles by his estimate. They always began traveling at first light, eating their breakfast rations as they rode. They would continue, usually getting anywhere between fifteen and thirty miles done before stopping for the evening and setting camp.

Sal, as Vickers had come to know the Hisstian snake person, took guard duty at night. Being a snake person gave him the same thermal vision that

Vickers knew Earth snakes had as well. So he saw much better at night than Vickers or Tarens, other human guard.

Tarens and Vickers took the day shift. Vickers had admitted to the other human that he and horses didn't get along well, so more often than not Tarens took the only other horse in the group on his escort rides. Vickers did this every now and then when the short balding man needed a break from the saddle. But Vickers got thrown more than a few times, so Tarens always begrudgingly took the reigns away quicker than he really wanted to.

That suited Vickers just fine. He always made sure to take the horse out a little ways anyhow and set one of his mini drones flying. A few minutes with his tablet and he could secure the drone to a tree, or a cliff, or whatever else. The drones acted as recon when he needed them to. But their primary purpose was to extend his communication range. The tiny, quarter sized machines didn't give him very good signal. And their batteries weren't good enough to even give him signal for very long. But in a pinch he could use them to send an SOS, or high priority intel. If he gave them the signal they would act as temporary cell towers for all of a minute. And if they weren't in range of the next drone in the conga line, then they could fly until they were, even if it took several solar recharge cycles to get there.

It was just bad luck that he'd been on escort duty when he'd spotted the downed tree. When the carriage had caught up Vickers had had Tarens bang on the carriage's roof to wake up Sal and Klenan. Sal had come out to help. It was Klenan's rule that the carriage driver didn't leave their seat in these kinds of situations. He wanted them to be able to begin riding if something happened.

That's a good move. Thought Vickers as he moved the downed tree. *Seeing as this is the perfect opportunity for an ambush. Isn't the downed tree always the classic wagon ambush tactic?*

It was as he had this thought that he heard the CRACK of a snapping twig behind him. He kicked some dirt at the deaf snake man. When he turned to look Vickers held his hand up, finger to his lips, to tell him to stay quiet.

But it was too late. Sal's eye's went wide, and then there was a loud THUNK as an arrow pierced one of those eyes. Then the scaled bodyguard dropped like a sack of potatoes.

Vickers rolled to the side quickly, drawing his sword from its sheath as he stood up. Two arrows flew past him, one sinking into the falling log and the other whizzing past into the brush on the other side of the road. He sprinted the few yards to the horse. It tramped its feet and whinnied as he approached. He grabbed the glowing orange shield from where it was hanging on the horses side.

He quickly ran his arm through the straps and grabbed the handle. As he did another arrow sank into the meat of the horses shoulder and caused it

to finally ignore its conditioning and begin running. Vickers jumped back to keep it from knocking him over as he turned to face the ambushers.

He saw two humans running toward him from the woods and a large, long-limbed, green thing with a massive bow and arrow behind them. He turned toward Tarens, about to tell him to run, only to see that the driver was already whipping the horse towards escape. Then an arrow hit Tarens in the gut. The balding man doubled over in pain, still whipping the horse to action as he did. The carriage rode past and juddered violently as it hit the log with its left wheels. Vickers ignored the squelching noise as its right wheels hit Sal's body.

He turned back just in time to meet the first of the bandits.

They swung what looked like a wood axe at him. He easily ducked beneath the swing, and as he spun past his sword bit deeply into the mans gut and slid out, slick with blood. The man fell to the ground and began clutching at his stomach.

Then Vickers stabbed forward, meeting the second man by impaling him in the chest. The mans eyes went wide as the sword rushed through his chest. He gasped as he dropped the sword (If the rusty slab of steel could be called a sword, Vickers thought) that he had been holding above his head. As he fell to the ground Vickers kicked him off of his blade.

As he did he also raised the shield up where he knew that it would be between him and the archer. He did it absently, as though not really paying attention. Contrary to that, he'd actually been keeping the archer in the corner of his eye. He'd seen the man raising up the bow to aim at him.

There was a bright flare of orange light. Vickers felt the shield recoil ever so slightly. Then there was a loud cracking noise, followed by the sound of sizzling flesh.

He dropped the shield to his side and saw that the Orc was looking at him in confusion. It dropped its bow as its hand reached up and touched the hole in its chest. There was still smoke pouring out of the opening. Then it fell backwards into the bush behind it.

Vickers scanned around. He thought he heard someone running. But they sounded like they were going farther away.

Probably the horse, and if not than its someone smart enough to get the hell out of dodge. He thought. *Still, I'd better check the tracks just in case.*

So he did. Sure enough, after a few minutes he found a pair of footprints, one of which seemed to drag a bit, heading away from the ambush sight in a hurry. He'd have to keep an eye on that. Curiously, it wasn't following the road in either direction.

Must be a camp somewhere. He thought. *Bet they have a horse or two.*

He checked the bodies, not finding anything terribly interesting. Then he dragged them to the side of the road. He placed them so that the three of them were sitting against a tree. Then he grabbed the log and dragged it over and set it on top of them. He checked his surroundings out, making sure that nobody was around, then he pulled out his tablet and knife. Using the lexicon the translators had sent him he carved a single word into the log.

[Bandits]

Seeing his work done, he wiped his hands on his pants. Then he headed back to where the foot prints were. He needed a horse after all.

He pulled out his tablet and wrote a short message to command, letting them know what had happened, and what he'd have to do to get back to the rest of his gear, which was in the carriage. He hit send and told the drones to send it at normal urgency settings.

Fucking sidequests. He thought as he began to whistle. *I'm in goddam D&D land, so there's always fucking sidequests.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sk7be1/wait_is_this_just_gate_79/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (77/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/shebyu/wait_is_this_just_gate_76/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Exposition. Disgusting stuff. Backstory. Foreplay..... But no, no pancakes. They aren't necessary right now.

Enjoy.

\~

Oh god. Don't throw up. James thought as he fought his stomach back down. *Don't throw up. Oh god. Why does it have so many penises?*

These were the thoughts running through James's mind as he looked at the corpse of the would be assassin in one of the mage laboratories beneath the castle.

The corpse in question was laid out on some kind of invisible suspension field that James resolved to ask about later. For now he was preoccupied with maintaining his composure as he looked at the splayed out, multi-limbed, mass of different faces and body parts before him. Parts of it were singed, and several had even been severed by the explosion from when it had fallen.

It didn't look like a person anymore. It looked more akin to some kind of starfish or sea anemone that had been brought up from the deepest parts of the ocean and had suffered the effects of decompression. It was also nearly ten feet wide at its widest point.

In short, it was absolutely disgusting.

Veliry and a few other mages, were intensely studying the creature. James, Amina, Kela, and a few of the other higher ranking guards were observing, all of them were armed in case the creature had any other tricks up its sleeve. James could tell that Kela was doing what she could to avoid barfing too. The smell was atrocious even for him. He could only imagine how it was for her heightened senses, human form or not.

Amina, oddly, was almost completely unfazed by the creatures appearance or smell.

"I have to say James." She said as she let go of the thing's head. He only knew that it was the head because it had locks of golden blonde hair at the end of it. "You shot this bastard in the perfect spot."

"Really?" He asked, trying to look without actually seeing. *Oh. Come on. Don't ralph.*

"Yes." She answered calmly as she reached over and inspected one of the numerous noses near the hair. "Hitting a changeling in the head is one of the few ways to instantly kill one." She took one of the measuring sticks that the mages were using and pointed it at a spot closer to the center of the mass of flesh. "The shot to the chest hit one of its lungs. But as you can see here-" She pointed at a mass that James recognized from his anatomy books. It had several similar mates nearby. "it has about five extra lungs. It could have just replaced that. That wound would have just been an inconvenience at best."

"Yeah?" He said as he tried not to think of the implications, given that he'd already been told about how changelings STOLE body parts from their victims.

Amina put the stick down, drew her knife, and before James could stop her she'd begun prying open the shattered skull.

That was all James OR Kela's stomachs could handle. Kela rushed out of the room quickly, even as James vomited onto one of the things legs. One of the nearby mages watched, and then shook their head in disappointment.

"Sorry." He said meekly as he wiped his mouth on the side of his sleeve. When he looked back up Amina was looking at him with pity. Then she pointed into the skull.

"See." She said, ignoring his sad state. "Only one brain. And your shot turned it into sausage filling."

James couldn't unsee that mental image. He threw up again.

"Why would you say that?" He asked as he kneeled on the ground, dry heaving.

"Sorry?" She said with a light chuckle.

"Why are you so comfortable with all this?" He asked.

"Because this bastard tried to kill me at my own betrothal announcement." She said simply. "I guess I'm just angrier than I am disgusted.

"OK. Well. If I'm not needed, than I think I'll wait outside." He said, face still green.

"I'll come with." She replied. "I'm sure Veliry and the other mages don't even need me for this. Right?" She asked the arch mage in question.

"Absolutely." Veliry answered, not even looking up from the talon she was measuring. "By the way, James I had the 'gift' delivered to Amina's room for you." She said, still not looking at them.

"Thanks." He said weakly.

Amina cocked an eyebrow as she placed a hand on his back and guided him out.

"Gift?" She asked.

"It was supposed to be a surprise." He admitted. "That thing-" he pointed his thumb over his shoulder as they walked out into the hallway. "interrupted before Vel and Danik could bring it up."

As he said this they ran into Kela, who was handing a soiled towel to one of the castle attendants. She looked as sick as James did.

"Sorry." Kela said. "The smell of that things bowels were.... overpowering."

"Is that what that smell was?" James asked, disgusted.

"Most of it." She answered. "Some of it was the older bodyparts." Kela looked at Amina. "Any idea which one it is?"

Amina put her hand to her chin as she thought.

"It only had one scalp in its collection. And it looked like it was better grafted than most of the other parts." She said. "Meaning that it was older. Maybe even its original hair." She stopped and thought for a moment. "Some of those parts had to be centuries old. I mean, it had a Retoran's tail."

"If memory serves correctly, they were wiped out by the Manachal Triarch's military..... what?..... seven hundred years ago?" Kela asked.

"Which means that one was old. Maybe one of the oldest ever recorded." Amina answered. "I think it might have been the Grinner."

"Hold up." James interjected in the nonsense conversation. "Are you saying that thing stole a body part seven hundred years ago?" He asked incredulously.

"At a minimum." Kela answered. "That was the LAST time anyone saw any Retorans. It likely stole the tail some time before that."

"Alrighty then." he replied. "Next question. What the fuck is a Retoran?'

"A monkey person." Amina replied simply. "I'd say that you shouldn't ever say that in front of one. But, as we've been over, they don't exist anymore."

"Got it." James said, just trying to keep up. "So what the fuck are changelings?' He asked. "Monsters? People?" He pointed back at the exam room. "Some... crazy flesh jellyfish?"

Both Amina and Kela exchanged glances. Amina spoke first.

"Well." She said as she shrugged. "Nobody really knows for sure."

"What do you mean? How do you not know?" He asked.

"Because they're rare." Kela replied. "You only hear about them maybe once every few years. Even then, you usually only hear rumors from far away." She thought for a moment. "I don't think one has been definitively KILLED, in almost thirty years."

"How's that even possible?" James asked.

"Again. They're rare." Amina emphasized. "On top of that, their shapeshifting ability makes it incredibly difficult to even detect them in the first place. Much less tracking one. An old enough, traveled enough, changeling can look like just about anyone, and its additional body parts make it capable of going just about anywhere with ease."

"Up mountains." Kela added. "Across deserts, tundra, into the deepest swamps. They've even been known to fly or swim into the depths of the oceans to escape." She nodded grimly. "With the right body parts they can legitimately go anywhere."

"And like I said in there." Amina began again. "They can even take extra organs. Making killing them incredibly difficult. They can even replace their hearts if they're fast enough. The brain is the only true weak point they have."

"And I just killed one?" James asked.

"Indeed. Your legend grows." Kela said with a grin.

"I don't think I like that." He replied. "Now you said that one was called the grinner?" He asked Amina.

"Well." She said, hesitantly. "I think it might be. We'll have to get more info. Veliry is going to work with Marcos to ummm...." She looked at Kela uncomfortably as she trailed off.

"They're going to perform necromancy to get more info." Kela said, finishing her friends statement."

James blanched at the thought.

"But Vel said-" James began.

"It's taboo." Kela interrupted. "Abominable, terrible magics. But when a changeling assassin makes an attempt on the life of a princess, a general, and who knows who else they may have targeted had things gone differently." She said gravely. "You bend rules."

James did not like that.

\---

Later, after James had taken a nice long bath to get the sick off of himself and handed over his uniform for cleaning and repair (he was startled at how tattered it had gotten) James went to Amina's room.

She had also bathed and changed, and was wearing simple pants and tunic. She was studying a piece of paper when he entered. James also noticed the box that Veliry had had dropped off.

"What's that?" He asked as he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her cheek.

She smiled as she turned in her chair.

"It's a list of the assassin's equipment." She answered. "Marcos managed to safely disenchant his bottomless bag. It had been damaged in the explosion he caused by dying with those rune stones in his hands."

"Bags of holding become dangerous when damaged." He said. "Noted."

She nodded.

"Yes. He had seven more rune stones, including a paralysis smoke stone." She said. "He should have used that when he shot at us. He might have succeeded." Then she spoke lowly, to herself. ""Unless he was saving it for when he made his escape."

James didn't really understand that. "The rune stones were what caused the explosions?" He asked. She simply nodded again. *I need to get some of those.* He thought.

"He also had a ring of mummification." She said, eyebrows furrowed. "Gods. He might be even older than we thought."

"And that does what?" James wondered. "Remember, I don't know any of this stuff."

"Right. Sorry." She said. James just held his hands up in an 'all good' gesture as he sat down. "Um. Basically, if you wear it, and if you know its incantation, you can enter a forced hibernation. You dry out and shrink into a smaller version of yourself. You can set them to last only a day or so. Or, if the ring's made well enough, you could set it to last years. Centuries even."

"Shit." Was all James could think to say to that.

"Yes." She said, oblivious to James's shock. "He could be older than any changeling out there. Hell, that could even explain how he got into the castle."

"Yeah?" James asked as he opened the box and pulled out the book about eyes.

"Yes. He could have mummified himself and then shipped in in a crate, or tied up under a carriage, or, hell, had someone throw him over the wall. As a changeling that kind of impact, even mummified wouldn't have been lethal."

"Damn." James said. "That's crazy." It was, he thought.

"The rest of his stuff is just random travelling gear. A concealement cloak, but its destroyed. The rest is the same kind of stuff we would have had on the trip north." She said. "Nothing special."

James walked up and placed the book in front of her. Amina looked at it in surprise. She couldn't understand the writing. But the image of an eyeball, even one that was drawn with a cutaway section and labeling, was obvious.

"What's this?" She asked as she picked it up and began leafing through the pages.

"It was supposed to be your surprise gift." James answered.

"That's an eye." She said pointing at the cover. James just nodded. "And this is..."She looked at some of the writing in the book. "this is from your world?" She asked. James just nodded again, smiling this time. "You asked your people to send over their knowledge on eyes?"

"I thought that maybe Veliry and Danik working together might be able to use it to help with fixing yours." He said, pointing at her eye patch.

"This." Her good eye started to water. She wiped it, and then removed the patch and wiped the moisture building there too. "This was your gift?" She asked, voice cracking.

James got up and rushed to her side. She stood and wrapped her arms around him as the shock of the day finally caught up to her. She absently placed the book on the desk behind her as she kissed him.

Then she pushed him towards the bed and they did even more.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sj2or8/wait_is_this_just_gate_78/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (76/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sf3k59/wait_is_this_just_gate_75/) / [First.](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Shit. Meet fan.

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James sat with Amina in the small antechamber listening to the King give his speech. Amina was in full dress uniform, though the red cloth had been replaced with a gold and green cloth instead. It had been custom made so that they would match when they stood next to each other. James's Medallion had been put on a red ribbon so that he would be wearing some of the kingdom's colors as well.

The two of them sat in silence, hands clasped as they waited for their cue. Amina had her betrothal present on her left arm. James's present was sheathed on his back. Amina didn't know it but her actual present, the one HE'D gotten for her was in a box that Veliry was holding as she sat with Danik. The two of them had been poring over the book since yesterday. James couldn't wait to see her reaction.

But his leg was tapping in nervousness. Amina ignored it for as long as she could. But eventually she asked the question that even James wanted an answer to.

"James?" She asked. He turned to her, a smile on his face. "Are you okay?

"Yeah." He answered quickly, a little too quickly. "Yeah I'm fine. Why?"

Her eyebrow cocked. "Your leg is about to punch through the floor. That's why." She said flatly.

He looked down and realized that she was right. He hadn't even noticed. Her hand left his and pulled his chin to look back at her.

"Seriously. Are you okay?" She asked again.

"I'm just...." He started. But how could he say this so that it wouldn't hurt her feelings. "It's just that. It's about to be real." He said. He

saw the concern on her face. "It's.... It's about to be official. You know? Us, I mean."

"Were we not already?" She asked as she looked down.

This time he pulled her face back to look at him. He kissed her forehead.

"Of course we were." He answered. "It's just. Now it's like OFFICIAL." He emphasized the last word while waving at the room the banquet was in. "Like. This is a THING." He said.

She smiled at his awkwardness. She wasn't sure if she'd ever understand the way he spoke. But somehow she understood what he'd just said perfectly. She leaned into him, and rested her head against his. "I know. And it's a lot for someone who's only been here a few months."

He sighed. "Yeah." He agreed.

She grabbed his hand again. "We'll just have to fight our way through it together." She said as she shook his hand in front of his face.

He couldn't help but smile.

Then the King said their cue.

She stood up, not letting go of his hand. "That's us dear." She said. James just nodded quickly, took a deep breath, and then stood up and joined her as she walked toward the door.

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Finally the moment was here.

King Farrick had just said the line that the blonde man knew was meant to signal the princess and her betrothed to emerge.

He'd been in his position since the night before, having snuck up and concealed himself before using his cloak to camouflage himself for the night.

He'd taken his concealment cloak and made it match one of the many gargoyles that rested at the top of the building. Then he'd wrapped it around himself in as form fitting of a setup as he could using some string. The resulting effect was that when he stayed completely still he looked as though he was one of the gargoyles. And he could do that easily.

He'd morphed his ears to match those of a Dark Elf he'd killed only a few years ago. As a result he could hear the king's speech perfectly. As well as most of the other whispered conversations going on in the room. He could even hear the princess herself, speaking with her betrothed as he got the jitters.

As he heard the king say the cue he transformed his feet back into their griffin form and stepped out. He fell for a second, then his foot caught the stone and clung on tightly.

He pulled the bow out of its bottomless bag, as well as the quiver. And prepared himself as he approached the large stained glass window below him.

When he got there he saw one of the few things that could legitimately ruin his plan.

The princess's betrothal gift was going to be an issue.

\---

James and Amina strode out onto the stage to the sound of applause.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the kingdom!" The King addressed the crowd. "Princess and General Amina, and her betrothed, the summoned hero. Specialist Choi!"

Amina lifted his hand in the air as he smiled and waved at the people. He'd seen them coming into the castle and moving about over the past few days. But now, seeing them all here, he finally had an idea of just how many of them there were. The room had at least two hundred people, of all kinds and sizes, in it. The applause was deafening.

After a few seconds she pulled him toward her. He took her other hand, difficult while her gift was on her arm, but doable. They'd rehearsed this a few times just to be safe. Then they pressed their foreheads together before kissing each other on the cheek. Lastly they stepped past each other and stood back to back.

As he was turning James could have sworn he saw something moving outside the window. But that was impossible, the top of the window was at least a hundred feet off the ground. It was probably just the stained glass. Or so he thought.

"For his betrothal gift..." The king continued the announcement. "My daughter requested a relic from our royal armory." He stated. This drew hushed whispers and gasps. James knew that this was a big deal. The armory, and its contents, was a legend to most people in the kingdom. "Because of Specialists Choi's actions to protect her against the vile Grabber Clan of the Portview forest. And I'm sure you've all heard those tales." He said to some light cheering. "I determined that this would be acceptable. He was given his choice of three relics." James reached back and grabbed the weapon off of his back, holding it up for all to see. "He has chosen the Mage's blade!' This drew cheers from the crowd as they witnessed the long, thin, blade shine in the light that poured through the stained glass.

\---

Shit. Thought the blonde man. *That's an issue too. Damn royals and their treasure troves.*

He reached back into his bottomless bag and pulled out a small stone with an orange rune on it. He thought for a moment and then pulled out another, this one with several green runes. He hurried to tie them to the tip of the arrow.

Suddenly he heard a bit of a commotion and looked down at the ground. His anger at the unexpected changes to the plan had made him sloppy. If things had gone as planned he'd have already taken the shot.

And now as he looked down he saw a guard looking up at him. But it was clear that the guard was struggling to see him. He was still camouflaged after all. The problem was that the guard was waving over one of his compatriots. And he could hear them asking for a looking glass.

Shit. Gods damn it all. He thought. *Guess It'll be one of the tough exits.*

He looked back, nocking the arrow as he did.

When he looked again he saw the princess holding up her gift. And suddenly he was glad he'd grabbed the two rune stones.

He emerged fully, hanging upside down in the window, and readied the bow.

\--------------------------------

"The Spirit Shield!" The king announced to the crowd. Once again there were cheers.

James turned to signal Veliry and Danick.

When he did, he saw that there was someone outside the window.

And they were aiming a bow at Amina.

"GET DOWN!" He yelled as he turned and pushed, wrapping his arms around her to get her out of the way.

The glass shattered. James heard it and began to wonder if he was too late.

Then Amina's arm, the one with the large, ornately made blue shield moved past him as if with a mind of its own. James had just a moment to remember the fact that it DID in fact have a mind of its own.

Then he heard a loud CLANG noise. Then there was an explosion. He and Amina were thrown into the wall.

\--------------------------------

SHITS

The blonde man scrambled to grab two more rune stones.

"Oy!" Yelled one of the guards below, even as the crowd inside began to scream and scramble. "INTRUDER! SOUND THE ALARMS!"

He dropped an orange rune down to silence the fool. It landed and exploded, though not as large as the dual rune explosion that had occurred inside. He watched in satisfaction as the guards limp body got tossed aside.

Then he readied the bow for another shot. But when he looked again he saw the "Hero" pointing at him. Then he realized that the hero had something in his hand.

\----------

James had taken just a moment to recover from the explosion. His head had been against Amina when they'd hit the wall. Luckily her shield had taken the majority of the explosion. But she'd still hit the wall hard enough that she was dazed. Luckily, her body had prevented him from getting more than winded.

And if anything, being out of breath would make this easier.

He kneeled down, keeping himself between her and the attacker, and with practiced fluidity drew his pistol from beneath his jacket. He didn't notice that the jacket was only open and unbuttoned because of the explosion.

The would be assassin looked James in the eye. James could see well enough to see that. They looked furious.

His finger tightened.

\----------

The blonde man had just a moment to wonder whether or not this was the hero's famous "pistol"?

Then there was a loud **CRACK!** as he saw a small spout of fire from the hero's hand.

He felt something hit him in the chest.

CRACK!

He felt something slap him in the face. His right eye went dark.

What was tha- Was the last thought he ever had.

His form spasmed. His left leg momentarily became that of an orc and lost its grip on the stone wall. His right arm, the one holding the arrow became a swollen mass as his stolen arms began to emerge. The arrow

snapped in the grip of the multiplying digits. His face shifted as numerous noses, ears, eyes, and other bits tried to escape the dying creature.

The only feature that remained the same was the blonde hair. It had been the one feature he'd never enjoyed changing. So he'd always gotten rid of other scalps that he'd had to absorb.

Regardless, he began to fall.

\---

"GUARDS!" James heard Kela scream from where she huddled over the king. "CHANGELING PROTOCOLS! DEFEND THE GUESTS!" She ordered.

There was another explosion outside. But it was far away, just like the second explosion had been. He also began to hear horns blaring.

The guards around the room quickly began ushering the guests out of the room. Kela spoke to the king as several of the other guards came to their aid. The king said something to her, then Kela nodded and began sprinting for the window. She was still in human form, so she wasn't as fast as usual, but she was still startlingly fast.

James watched as she approached the window. One of the other guards, James noticed that they had some lupine features too, joined her. Before he knew what was happening the two of them had crashed through the window, weapons drawn, and plummeted out of sight.

But that wasn't his problem. He turned back.

"Amina!" He called as he grabbed her by the shoulders.

Luckily she was already coming back to her senses. "James?" She asked, clearly dazed. "What happened? Why does my arm hurt so much?" She flexed her shield arm as she asked this.

"Your gift ended up doing what you said it would." He answered as he helped her to her feet. "Come on. We gotta get you out of here. That guy was aiming at you."

"What guy?" She asked.

"With any luck, the one that's splattered all over the ground outside." He replied as he began pushing her back through the door to the anteroom.

[[NEXT]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/si9vpx/wait_is_this_just_gate_77/?utm_medium=android_app&utm_source=share)

Wait, is this just GATE? (75/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/seafxl/wait_is_this_just_gate_74/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Had to reupload because I jacked up the title. And yes. This is a lot of foreshadowing. How did you know?

^(Or is it?)

\~

James looked at the books with great interest. He recognized a few of them from his college classes, and was incredibly envious of the copy of Grey's Anatomy, even if it was a touch out of date. He also blushed a bit when he saw the flowers, champagne, and card.

Or at least he did until he read the card. The card's message was nice. But he was smart enough to read the subtext in it. The long and short of the message was; Congratulations on fucking up successfully. Still, it was a nice enough gesture.

Naturally Kela and Amina had accompanied him to the Summoning Room when they'd gotten word of a package arriving. It had arrived in a similar padded box to last time. Sure enough, when James had pulled apart some of the foam he'd found more ammo. He resolved to let the other side know that the spy-craft wasn't necessary with that anymore. But he could do that later.

Amina loved the flowers. Especially the white lilies, which apparently didn't exist in this world. James made a note to take one to one of the druids, if he could, and see if they could germinate some of them. Then he actually touched them and realized that they were fake. Very well made, and likely expensive. But still fake.

Probably safer that way. He thought. *Who knows what our plants would do to this world's ecosystem.* Then he had a disturbing thought. *Wait. Are those bugged? Fuck I don't even know how I would find that out without destroying them. Whatever.*

He explained to Amina and Kela that the flowers and the bottle of champagne were gifts for their engagement. He left out what the books were for. He wanted them to be a surprise. Instead he told them that he wanted the books to help him with some magic he wanted to try. This wasn't entirely a lie, but he wouldn't be the one trying the magic. At least not any time soon.

By the time he'd finished explaining that, Veliry had arrived. She'd been notified of the package's arrival and had been on her way. But James had also sent one of the servants to bring her quickly, that he had things she might be able to use to help him with his magic.

When she got there he pulled her aside and told Amina that if she wanted she could take the flowers and champagne to her room and he would meet her there. Though he also mentioned that the champagne was for the banquet and not right now. She looked disappointed at that, but was still

happy with the gift. She and Kela practically ran out of the room talking about the flowers.

Then James told Veliry about the real gift. He explained what the books had in them. How their information might help their healing mages change their practices and maybe improve some of their abilities. He asked her to take the Ophthalmology book to Danik and help him understand the information inside, since she knew how to read English now. He emphasized the fact that he wanted it to be a secret until the banquet, since it was a gift to Amina. Up until then Veliry had been practically shaking with excitement at the books. The requirement to keep it secret, and the fact that she was going to be acting as a translator for a bit, brought her back down. But she was more than happy to do so once she realized that it was intended to help Amina.

With that sorted James handed her the books and watched as the mage went on her way. Then James picked up the black plastic case and carried it back to his room.

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When he got there he went into his small closet and pulled out something that he'd had made back when Kela had taken him on his shopping trip. He had been a bit too busy to try it on until now. But he figured he should probably check the fit before he wore it in public. After all the banquet was partly for him and Amina, he might as well look good.

The pants were fine. Simple tan slacks that actually fit a lot better than the ones he'd had back on Earth. The Jacket was a bit loose for his taste, and the material inside was a bit off, but other than that it seemed pretty much spot on. It didn't have any of its normal pins, ribbons, or patches. But there wasn't a lot he could do about that just now, so he'd just have to wear it blank. The shirt and shoes had actually been easy to get. The tailor had already had plenty of shirts that were close enough to what he wanted, simple adjustments had gotten it pretty much spot on. The cobbler had had shoes that looked eerily similar to James so that had been even easier.

The tie and the hat were the big issues. When James had described the tie the tailor had looked at him in confusion and then joked about going to the royal executioner if he wanted a noose. Eventually James had simply asked him to just make it and the tailor had reluctantly agreed, even if he didn't really agree. The hat had required James to actually go back to the castle and download a picture of one on his phones terrible signal. When he'd returned the tailor had explained that that was simply a sailor's captain hat, hence why they didn't really have any in the capital. But it was doable, even if the colors made no sense.

James was, overall, pleased with the outfit. It wasn't perfect. But given the fact that it was made with medieval technology and a mechanic's explanation, he thought it wasn't half bad. Definitely not up to regs, but close enough for "government in another plane of existence" work.

He stood in front of the mirror admiring himself when Kela walked into her room.

"Hey Kel!" He shouted.

"Yes?"

"Come on in and tell me what you think." He requested.

He heard her walking over to his room. Then she entered and looked at him. She cocked an eyebrow as she tilted her head.

"This is the uniform you requested?" She asked.

"Yeah." He said turning to show off the sides and back. "Not bad right? I mean. It aint PERFECT. But it's pretty close."

"An odd choice of colors." She said as she pulled at the sleeve. "Is this... battle ready?" She asked.

"Oh god no." He admitted. "I mean. Don't get me wrong. I'll fight in it, you know, if I have to. But no. This is primarily for formal functions."

"Ah. You showed me pictures of it on your phone before. Could you show me some again?" She asked.

"Yeah." He answered as he grabbed his phone from the dresser. After a few taps the picture was pulled up in his gallery. It showed him at the Army birthday ball a few years earlier, still a PV2. "I aint got none of the badges or anything. But... Meh, I'll get those made later. Or maybe the colonel can send me some." he said.

Kela held the phone up, looking at the picture, then back to James. After a few moments she nodded.

"The tailors did a good job of emulating the original." She agreed.

"Right? Imma wear it for the banquet." He said.

She considered this, then nodded. "I think that would be fitting. Do you typically wear weapons in this uniform?"

He thought about the odd question for a second. "Uh. Not typically. I mean NCO's and officers might wear a saber, but it's mostly decorative. Most of the time an actual weapon is a bit of a no no." He admitted.

"Hmm. I don't think I like that." She said. "Our soldiers are always armed when they're in uniform. Even if they're at a formal function. There aren't many exceptions to that."

"Well. Different militaries." He said with a shrug. "I suppose I will end up wearing my present though." He said. "Plus I don't ever take off my pistol when I'm out and about. So I guess I'll be kinda breakin' rules. But, whatever."

"It happens." She agreed. "I must admit a bit of envy of your present. I've seen it in the armory before. And I've always wanted to try it out."

"Well. I'll have to let you give it a few test swings." He said, causing her to grin at the idea. "By the way, what does that orb the king gave you do?" He asked. "You seemed almost scared of it."

Kela stiffened at the mention of the orb. She looked hesitant. But she answered.

"It's a tear of the moon goddess." She answered solemnly. She also looked scared again. "It's..... well. It's literally what the name implies. There aren't a lot of them in existence anymore. They're very powerful, and there were only ever a few dozen to begin with."

James was concerned at her level of hesitance about the subject. But he was also curious. "What does it do?"

She took a deep breath.

"With a key phrase. And a drop of blood. The stone becomes a beacon of the moon's light." She looked down. "It shines bright enough to be seen for miles. Any werewolf that sees it will transform, regardless of what phase of their form they're in. They become the purest incarnation of their bestial form. Stronger, faster, more in tune with their senses. Their regenerative abilities become second only to trulls and selkies."

"That sounds awesome." He said. "But. You also said it damns them for the rest of their lives?"

"It does." She said. "Once this transformation occurs. There is no turning back. They will never shift back to their human form."

James didn't know what to say to that. "That sounds... not so bad." He said hesitantly.

"There's more." She said. "The enhanced abilities, especially the enhanced senses. They bring the wolf to the forefront. The wolf taking charge was why I killed your Sergeant." She said, cringing at the memory. James stiffened at the mention. "It's why I failed when the grabbers attacked."

She sat on the chair nearby and hung her head.

"When those instincts take over." She continued. "It's difficult to resist. And the farther towards the wolf you are in your transformation, the harder it becomes TO resist." She shook her head. "I've always had an issue with it. It's why I haven't ever gotten past Captain." She admitted. "Because I struggle to control those instincts. And when you feel the moon goddess's kiss. That's what we call it when one of these is used." She shook her head. "That transformation. It's said to be like diving headfirst into being the wolf. The times when these artifacts have been used. Only a handful of those affected have ever been able to

maintain their human minds. Even then, they've all described it as being akin to fighting to stay above water during a maelstrom."

James just looked at her in horror. The implications of what she'd just told him were terrifying.

"It turns you into monsters." He said.

Kela just nodded. "The light of the orb shines for five minutes." She said. "Five minutes of transforming any wolf that sees it. But for those five minutes the person inside has complete control. They become a warrior the likes of which are rarely seen." She looked at him. "But once those five minutes are up. Only the strongest of souls can even form a sentence afterwords."

"Why did the king give it to you?" He asked.

"For the sake of protecting the banquet." She answered. "I'm the highest ranking werewolf in the castle guard. And there are a lot of high ranking members of our society that will be there. Should something happen the king may order me to activate it."

James looked at her in shock. "But you'd become a monster!" He exclaimed, shocked that the king could do something to his soldiers, let alone his daughter's best friend.

"Yes. But for five minutes I, and any other wolf willing to join me, would become unstoppable killing machines." She replied. "I assure you. The orb is a last resort. If the king orders me to use it. It'll mean that something terrible has happened."

James blew out a long breath. "Well." He said after a few seconds. "Let's hope it doesn't come to that."

Kela forced herself to smile. "I doubt it will." She said. "He's just playing it safe. We haven't had cause to use one of these for nearly three centuries." She decided to change the subject. "Now tell me. Why did your military choose green and brown?"

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/shebyu/wait_is_this_just_gate_76/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (74/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sdlsk2/wait_is_this_just_gate_73/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Whooo! More board movement. Also more characters to interact with. Some potential deus ex machina's. AND. James's first epic loot drop.

Enjoy.

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Colonel Muhammed sat in her office studying the message that Specialist Choi had sent to her roughly two hours earlier. She also watched and re-watched the footage of the magic he'd learned. She couldn't deny that she was impressed by his progress, or for that matter the effects that the spells had on the training dummy. In fact she was a touch jealous of the idea of fire magic. She was a smoker, and the idea of being able to light one of her cigars with a fingertip was damn tempting.

Speaking of which, she wondered if a nice cigar would mellow out the migraine that Choi's message was giving her.

That fucking idiot ass motherfucker. She thought as she read the message again. *What in the fuck was he thinking?*

She couldn't deny that his idea had some upsides. It was a hell of an olive branch. Plus if Choi's logic was correct it could have huge repercussions, and in this case mainly positive ones.

But the idea of freely sharing information with a foreign government rankled in her mind.

And his reason for wanting it was downright infuriating. She'd warned him specifically against this kind of thing.

She didn't have a lot of recourse though. Choi was, ultimately, untouchable right now. He was in a different universe. So she couldn't exactly article fifteen him. It wasn't like he was being paid, or had an actual use for his rank.

The fact that a lowly specialist was the highest ranking military official in an area, even though he had a line of communication with a Colonel? Well that was downright wrong in her book.

But she couldn't show her hand yet. Chief Vickers was on his way to the capital. Plus, MSgt Arroyo and CPT Lukas were over there now expanding base camp operations. So, the name of the game right now was subterfuge. If the government on the other side learned that they could send people and equipment through effectively at will. Well, that could cause problems.

If they found out that we had that much access they might start looking at things more closely. Can't have that. She thought.

Then she read the message again.

If I ever get over there. She thought. *I'm gonna skull drag that little shit across the damn multiverse. Then his new wife will probably have me beheaded. But it'll be fucking worth it.*

She picked up her pad and typed a message out to the techs.

>Prep a few medical textbooks for transit. Ensure that at least one of them is Optometry/Ophthalmology focused.
>
>Hell, send one of those fancy illustrated copies of Grey's Anatomy.
>
>Additionally, send a bouquet of flowers and champagne, and have someone bring me a congratulatory card to fill out.
>
>Specialist Choi's new fiance needs her eye fixed.

She knew the last line wasn't necessary. By now the techs had already seen the message. But she had to vent frustration somehow. Sarcasm was all she could spare right now.

At least the card would give her a chance to send Choi a message explaining the level to which she was angry with him. Even if it had to be veiled in flattery.

She hit the send button.

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Vickers did not enjoy riding horses. It was uncomfortable. They smelled. They shit everywhere. And he'd been bitten by one as a kid. But he'd known that horses were going to be a large portion of this world's transit system. He could get over it.

Somehow, even though he wasn't directly on the horse, driving a carriage was worse.

He'd had this revelation the day before. After his meeting with Klenan's trader friend he'd managed to secure transportation to the capital. Even better, all he had to do was act as a body guard on the way there. Nothing he hadn't done plenty of times before.

But the carriage he was driving was meant for freight. It had no space for him except the drivers seat, and that seat was not comfortable. It was hard wood, and the carriage had no real suspension, so the ride was rough and his ass cheeks hurt. Plus the two horses pulling it barely listened.

Picna, the trader he was traveling with, was decent enough. He was a dwarf, and under other circumstances Vickers thought he might've liked the guy. They probably could have been damn good drinking buddies.

But he was about to be traveling with Picna for almost two months. And the stocky, white haired dwarf NEVER shut up. Vickers could count the amount of hours that Picna hadn't been constantly speaking on one hand. And only a few of those hours were while Vickers had been trying to sleep the night before.

It was obvious that the other two body guards felt the same way. Hell, one of them was deaf and he still looked annoyed. Even so, Vickers envied the snake skinned man for his deafness.

But, for all of Picna's shortfalls, he seemed a decent boss. The other guards were annoyed with the dwarf. But, when Vickers had asked they'd both admitted to traveling with him for over a year. The pay was good. And the other carriage, the one Picna drove himself, was actually a traveling house. Startlingly comfortable and roomy inside, and better than most people had for actual houses.

Vickers had been curious about this, and Picna had been more than happy to show him the inside of the carriage. Vickers had been so amazed by the thing that he'd almost forgotten to tell his jacket to record. The inside of the carriage, which looked rather plain on the outside, was practically a mansion. It had five rooms and two bathrooms, plus it had an entire kitchen. Vickers had questioned this but Picna had become confused. Apparently these things were all over the place, and wherever Vickers had traveled from must be very poor indeed for him not to know of them.

Regardless, Vickers slept in ultimate comfort each night. Way better than the tavern.

Picna was annoying. But Vickers thought that might be his biggest complaint on this trip. Barring any unexpected occurrences as they traveled.

Either way. He was on his way to the capital.

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James accompanied Amina and Kela as they followed the king on an inspection of the castle.

The banquet was only a few days way now. Other nobles from around the country were already beginning to gather in the capital. Some were even staying in the castle. James had been amazed to see an actual mermaid being pushed along in a tall, ornate, tank of water. They were the mayor of one of the port cities on the east side of the country. Amina had assured him that he would see people far more interesting than her as more dignitaries arrived.

As a result, the castle was heightening its security. King Farrick was walking around ensuring that everything was up to grade. Kela and Amina were following, giving orders to soldiers and staff for how to enact improvements.

The King had asked James to join him so that he could show him the Royal Armory. He told James that it was partly so that he could show off. But it also served the purpose of giving James info, and if necessary, to be a subtle show of power to his people since they wouldn't understand what any of it could do. James had appreciated the honesty about why he was being brought along.

He also couldn't deny how cool the armory was.

The door to the armory had reminded James of the one that had guarded Veliry's room. It was startlingly mundane when he'd first seen it. It simply looked like a wrought iron door. Heavy duty, but not terribly fancy.

But when the king had knocked on it, numerous eyes and mouths had opened immediately. Unlike Veliry's door, there was no questioning. The door greeted the king in a chorus of voices. The king had gestured to James and instructed the door to let him pass this one time. The door had voiced its acceptance of the command, and then opened. It still weirded James out.

The inside of the armory looked like exactly what he'd expected when the king had explained it to him.

It was at least a hundred feet going both ways. Despite just how much stuff was in it, it was actually incredibly organized. He had a vague impression of the Indiana Jones relic warehouse because of all the crates stacked against one of the walls. But the other three walls were devoted to different magical items.

One wall had different armors of all shapes and sizes, some of them glowing or pulsing with strange energies that James knew were enchanted. One suit of armor beckoned to him to come closer. But when he looked at Kela she simply shook her head.

I'm just gonna assume that it would kill me and move on. He thought.

Another wall was similar, only instead of armor it was devoted to weapons. James was almost certain that he'd seen one of the swords on his brothers World of Warcraft inventory screen. But he kept that bit of info to himself. He also saw a war-hammer that was almost three times as big as he was. It was hanging from a chain that held it off the ground. Its head glowed a bright orange and James could feel heat coming off of it. Kela shook her head even harder when she saw him looking at it.

The third wall was the one James couldn't quantify. Most of the items on it also seemed to pulse with magical energy. But he also couldn't recognize them. There was a harp that was kept inside a glass case. A red glass bottle that looked like its contents were moving. There was a book, bound in red velvet, that seemed to whisper to James whenever he looked at it. Oddly, when he looked at Kela she actually shrugged in a 'meh, i don't know' sort of way. Somehow that made him feel even more cautious.

"James." The King said as he picked up a grayish white sphere and handed it to Kela, who took it gently and put it into a silk pouch. "In this room lies some of the most powerful artifacts in our kingdom." He placed his hand on the velvet book and stroked it. It seemed to purr when he did. "If we were to unleash this vault and go forth with even half of these things. We could conquer this world." He continued. "But if we did. We'd also cause untold levels of chaos and destruction. And would likely anger the gods in enough ways that they would wage war upon us." He took James's shoulder and pointed him at Kela. "That sphere I gave her, by

itself, can make every werewolf that sees it into an unstoppable killing machine. And all it takes is a few words and a drop of blood."

Kela interrupted, though the king didn't mind. "It would also damn them for the rest of their lives." She said solemnly.

"But it, like everything else here, is a dagger in a sheath." James recognized the reference to the card game Amina had taught him. "Something you use when you have no other option." He looked James in the eyes. "I told you why I brought you in here. Please. Take what I'm saying to heart."

James looked around as he nodded.

"Yeah. I think I can do that." He agreed.

"Good. Now I'm going to show you the gift that you'll be receiving during the banquet." The king said.

"I'm getting a gift?" He asked.

"You and Amina both. It is the way with betrothals." Kela answered. "Typically your family would supply the gift for Amina. But, circumstances being what they are, we'll make an exception."

James looked at Amina and winced. "Guess I'll need to figure something out about that."

"It's fine." She said with a smile.

Then the king gestured toward three wooden boxes sitting on the counter in front of them.

"Take a look. We chose a few that we thought you might like." The king instructed. "Pick ONE."

James looked to Amina who nodded. Then he stepped forward and opened the first box. It glowed with a pulsing purple light.

"Holy shit!" He exclaimed.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sf3k59/wait_is_this_just_gate_75/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (73/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/scopno/wait_is_this_just_gate_72/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yaaaay another character for me to flesh out and keep track of.

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"Hello. I am Danik Smytherson." Said a rotund man as he shook James's hand. "I am finally making it here after just missing you at Jadesport." He added as he shook Amina's hand as well. Then he pointed at her eye patch. "I am here to look at your looker." He said with a laugh.

James couldn't tell if he was an elf or a dwarf, or maybe something else. He had features that could fit either category, and he was nearly as wide as he was tall. He also had an accent that reminded James of a few Danish soldiers he'd met while in training, though it wasn't a perfect match. Regardless, Danik's cheery personality and scraggly blonde beard made James feel oddly comfortable.

He was the eye specialist that the doctors at Jadesport had sent for back before the group had left to see the blight. He'd been delayed a little bit by some road difficulties. But if James was honest, he had to admit that he'd forgotten about him. Between his developing relationship with Amina, the confusion that the blight had caused for him, and the developments since then, he'd completely forgotten that they had asked for him.

For obvious reasons Amina hadn't forgotten about him. She was incredibly excited when a servant had found her and James having breakfast in the mess hall. James had had to scramble to match her excitement. But forgetting about the healer had left him feeling a touch insensitive.

Either way, Danik was here now introducing himself. James didn't have to fake being excited that Amina might be able to see soon. He knew she had been feeling down about the hindrance. Kela had her hand on Amina's shoulder as she spoke to the healer.

Danik struck James as being a bit of an oddball. Between his energy and overall jolly nature James thought that he would have made a great pediatrician, or maybe a Mall Santa, or whatever the equivalent of one would be here anyways.

Either way, he liked Danik, and it seemed like Amina did as well.

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A few hours later, after Danik's carriage had been offloaded and a healing room had been set up with what he needed, James sat outside with Kela. He didn't know why but he was nervous. Kela inevitably picked up on it. She placed a hand on his knee and pressed down. James hadn't even noticed his foot bouncing up and down.

"It'll be okay James." She said simply.

James removed her hand and began bouncing again. "You don't know that." He said. It came off meaner than he meant it to.

"I do though."

"How?" He asked, looking at her curiously.

"Because." Kela said as she turned toward him. "It has already been okay for the past few weeks since it happened."

"No it hasn't."

"It has though." She replied. "Sure, it's been unpleasant for her. But you saw for yourself that she was able to beat Artair. It wasn't as clean of a job as she'd normally manage. But she did it. And she hasn't been bumping into things, or tripping as often." Kela added. She thought for a moment. "She's tough, and she adapts well. Good news or bad. She'll be okay. You're just here to support her whichever way it goes." With that she sat back and went back to waiting.

James hated that he couldn't argue any of those points. Why was he so damn nervous? He thought for a while. Then he admitted what he didn't really want to.

"I think I'm just nervous because I blame myself." He admitted quietly.

Kela cocked an eyebrow, but decided not to say anything.

"I should've been awake when we were attacked. I don't think I've ever stopped blaming myself for that. Even though I know it's not my fault. I mean, I was knocked out. Not much I could've done about that." He admitted.

Kela winced, reminded of her own failure. But she remained silent.

"Then at the camp. I.... I don't know. Maybe if I'd gotten to her sooner?" He hung his head. "I don't know man. It just feels like my fault."

She let him sit for a minute.

"We've been over this. I can't make you feel any differently." She began. "But at the end of the day the fault, ultimately, is mine. I was on guard. I was the one who let their instincts override their judgment. I was the one that failed." She said. "If anyone deserves the blame for what happened. Or for what the healer ends up saying. It's me." She looked at him. "End of discussion."

He didn't like that. But again, her logic was pretty damn solid.

"Yeah, well. I still feel guilty." He said stubbornly

"That's allowed." She said simply.

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It was nearly another hour before the door opened again. Danik came out with a neutral expression on his face.

James didn't like that.

"Mister James. Please. Come in." He said as he gestured to the door.

James REALLY didn't like that. He looked at Kela and saw that she was having the same concerns he was.

James stood up and followed him into the room.

When he entered Amina was sitting on the edge of the small bed. To James's surprise she was actually smiling. He walked over and sat next to her. She took his hand.

"So I have good new and bad news." Danik began as James sat.

James looked at Amina. She smiled, but it was a small smile. She gripped his hand a bit tighter.

"You already know?" He asked her. She just nodded.

"Ya. The good news is that I can IMPROVE Princess Amina's eye sight in that eye." He said with a smile.

"I'm guessing that you emphasized IMPROVE for a reason?" James asked.

Danik nodded his head sadly.

"Unfortunately you are right. I can repair some of the damage. And when I leave here, whenever that may be, I will also leave the supplies and instructions so that you can continue the healing therapy on your own afterwards." He said, addressing Amina again. "If you're lucky. Some day it MIGHT get you back to your original visions." He shook his head. "But the odds are good that an improvement is the best we will get."

Amina, to her credit, didn't look sad. In fact James thought she looked relieved. He squeezed her hand and smiled when she looked at him.

"On the up side." Danik continued. "Once we've finished and your vision is improved. I should be able to make you some spectacles that would get you close enough to clear vision that you would be able to see just fine." He turned to James. "Hopefully you don't mind a woman in glasses." He said jokingly.

James just looked at Amina and deadpanned. "Well damn. I guess this betrothal is over."

She looked at him in shock. But James couldn't hide the smile that crept over his face. She slapped him on the shoulder before the two of them began laughing.

Danik chuckled and smiled as the couple joined hands again.

Amina turned to him. "When can we start the process?" She asked.

Danik gestured around at the crates around him, and the counter that had his carry bag laid out on it.

"I have to unpack a bit more. Some of the more delicate supplies are still in the crates." He said. "But we should be able to start tomorrow. As long as that's okay?"

"We'll make the time for it." She replied.

"Alrighty then." He said cheerily. "I'll get started unpacking. You two go on your way. I will have one of the castle attendants send word when things are ready." He placed his hand on top of theirs. "It is good to be meeting you both."

James really did like Danik, odd as he was.

The two of them got up and went out to tell Kela the news.

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"I think-" James said before grunting. "I like Danik." He took a deep breath. "I think he'll be a good doctor for you."

He swung the chain while raising his shield up with his left arm. Amina rolled away from the shield and caught the chain with her sword before spinning back to strike again. James had just gotten the chain back from Kraug. One end had been replaced by a short metal pole wrapped in leather. The pole also had a small half hook coming off of it so that he could hold the chain in place with his swinging thumb, allowing him to control its length when he needed it to be shorter. It was nearly fifteen feet long after all.

The rest of the chain had been cleaned of its rust and grime, and several of the links near the other end had been replaced with spiked links. Kraug had explained that they would do more damage to whatever he hit. They had the added benefit that if he needed the chain to grab onto something he could.

Amina had agreed to a bit of sparring/training to help him test the new chain out. They'd both donned some training armor and grabbed their weapons. And now they were in a melee. Though James knew she was holding back.

"Me too." She said, not breathing anywhere near as hard as he was. "He's very nice."

"Too." James had to dodge a strike that had snaked past his shield. "Bad." Another strike at his exposed shin. "Holy shit woman." He said as he tried to swing the chain at her shield, trying to pull it to the side. Unsuccessfully. "Too bad he can't heal it all the way." He said, finally having a full breath.

"Agreed." She said before unexpectedly dissappearing outside of James's view.

Suddenly the side of James's helmet rung like a bell and he staggered a bit as she backed off.

"Five to zero my dear." She said with a smirk. "Honestly. I expected worse news from him." She admitted.

"I kinda figured from how you were acting in there." He said as he rubbed underneath the helmet with his shield hand. Then he slapped the side of the helmet and began advancing again. "Wanna go for a ride after this?" He asked.

She stepped back in. "Sure. I imagine Steve could use a breather." She answered before coming in for a thrust.

James batted it aside, then swung the chain at her from the side. But before it got all the way there, and as she was readying her shield to sweep the strike away, he twirled the handle of the chain and redirected the chain into a downward sweep.

The new attack caught Amina off guard, though only for a moment. She quickly jumped, barely clearing the chain. But then James's real plan kicked in. He twirled the chain a second time as he quickly brought the arm back. As a result the spinning chain caught Amina on the back with one of the spiked links (wrapped in burlap, courtesy of Kraug) causing her to land off balance, and also knocking her sword arm out of place.

James spun the chain again, faster this time, and before Amina could react it had wrapped around her sword arm and was pulling her towards him. James gave the chain a hard yank and sent her stumbling into him. He wrapped her up in a big bear hug and lifted her off her feet.

"Five to one *Darling."* He said snarkily as she flailed about.

Then she headbutted him.

James's helmet did a good job of keeping the headbutt from breaking anything. But he still felt blood gush out of his nose from the impact as he dropped her in surprise. He staggered back again, reaching up to try to pinch his nose. But the helmet's face guard got in the way.

"Six to one." She said, before seeing James bleeding. "James!" She exclaimed as she dropped her shield and ran over to him.

"Why would you headbutt me?" He asked as he pulled the helmet off of his head and clamped his fingers over his nose. "Rude."

"I'm sorry. I just don't like losing." She admitted. "Oh gods it's making a mess. Sit down and tilt your head back. Besides, training is full contact." She added.

James did as he was told as she removed one of the burlap wraps from his chain and wadded it over his nose.

"Ow! That's scratchy!" He complained.

"Oh, quit being a baby!" She said with a laugh.

"Aaaagh!" He cried, mostly joking. "Next time you want to vent some anger about something can you please use someone else's face?"

She pinched his nose harder as she scoffed at him. Then she pulled him back until his head was resting on her lap.

"Complain more." She said, somewhat irritably.

James put on the posh English accent he'd used to charm her before. "Yes I'm afraid that my darling fiance has a slight tendency towards beating me." He said with a grin. With his nose plugged it somehow sounded even smugger than usual.

Amina broke out laughing. After a moment she looked back at him. "Keep it up and I just might." She said.

"Hmm. Well..." He replied. "At least the accommodations are nice." He replied as he made a show of stretching his arms out, before placing his hands under his head and closing his eyes.

"Yeah for you." She said, before kissing his forehead. "I, on the other hand, have some weird midget resting his massive head on my legs."

James feigned shock and placed his hand over his heart.

"Oh! My word. She's verbally abusive too." He said in the nasally posh voice again, drawing more laughter.

They stayed that way for some time, joking and teasing each other. At least until Kraug came out complaining about how they were using the training area wrong.

James didn't tell her that he thought he might have an idea about how to help Danik with the healing. He'd thought of it a while ago. But he wanted to ask the healing specialist before he moved forward. Plus it was likely to upset command a bit. After all, he'd likely have to tell them about his betrothal in the process.

But that was an issue for later.

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For once, the blonde man wasn't watching the couple as they moved about.

Instead he was wandering about the city. He had a fairly straight forward plan when it came to his objective. That part of a job was easy. In fact he thought that was probably the easiest part of any job. Especially one as open to interpretation as his current one.

It was escaping that was the difficult part. So many people in his line of work had done fantastic work getting their jobs done, only to get caught because they hadn't thought of their exit route. He knew that a single exit plan wasn't good enough. One wasn't even what he would consider the bare minimum. Three. Three was a good minimum for exit plans.

He'd already gotten himself a mount. A few coins and a key phrase to the right person had gotten him a good riding horse with a saddle and some saddlebags with enough supplies for a week. Even better there was no paper trail leading to him on the books either.

After a few hours he'd also found the sewer hole he'd been hoping to. He'd used it a few centuries earlier and knew that it would get him well away from the castle in a pinch. When he'd used it before it had actually taken him OUT of the city. But when he'd followed its route, tracing it in his memory, it had actually led to an alley behind a brothel.

It wasn't perfect, but in a pinch it would get him out of the eyes of the authorities. He made sure to stash a bottomless bag with some basics near the exit. He could check to make sure there was nothing blocking his way IN the sewers later.

The last of his minimum three escape preparations was the one he always both dreaded, and secretly hoped for.

His primary plan, the horse in this case, was always meant to be the easy, obvious way. That was the plan he'd use if he escaped without detection. The second plan was always the difficult way. The way that he'd use if he had to, but not if he could avoid it.

The third plan was always the wild card. It was the plan he would use if there was absolutely no other option. There would be no turning back if he activated it. In fact, in this case there likely wouldn't be much of a city left if he activated it.

But it would cause so much of a commotion that nobody would even bother to look for him while it was active.

Just as the sun was beginning to set he found the perfect place for it. Once it was dark he clambered up the side of the temple he'd chosen. It was on the opposite side of town from where the banquet was going to be taking place in the castle, and almost at the edge of the city. He climbed all the way up the side of the temples beacon tower. His clawed legs and now simian arms (and prehensile tail) allowed him to ascend the tower easily.

When he got to the top he looked at the castle. His eyes shifted from their normal brown color to a bright gold with wide pupils. He'd gotten those eyes from a griffin, and they allowed him to see much further than normal, especially in the dark. They did give him a headache though.

He looked and saw exactly what he hoped to. The windows to the royal feast hall.

If he ended up using this plan. They'd have a beautiful view of the destruction it would cause. All they'd have to do is look out their window.

And while they were doing that, he would slink away unseen.

He smiled wide, showing far too many teeth. Then he wedged the small red jewel under one of the tower's shingles and climbed back down.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/seafxl/wait_is_this_just_gate_74/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (72/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sc8eyr/wait_is_this_just_gate_71/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Bit filler-ish. Also food focused to an extent. But also, more pieces are being moved on the board.

Enjoy.

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James approached the blackened, patched together, iron banded door before him with great dread.

He didn't want to go in. He hated what he knew was awaiting him on the other side. He'd never even been here yet, and he still knew that he was going to be miserable the second he walked through the door.

Still. He thought. *A job's a job. Plus I do kind of owe command for going dark for so long.*

With a deep breath, and a head hung low, James reached out and knocked on one of the few bits of the door that still looked relatively new.

He waited a few moments. When he didn't hear anything he knocked again, louder this time. Luckily he heard noise on the other side. Then the door did something unexpected.

Two pieces of the wood spread open in an oddly biological fashion, and before James realized what was happening, he was looking at a large eyeball fashioned from wood.

It took a second to register what was happening, but when he did James jumped back aghast. The eye followed him.

Then another part, to the side of the eye, opened up revealing a set of wooden lips and teeth.

"\[Oh, hello James.\]" It said in Veliry's voice. James's skin crawled at the sound. It was so weird. "\[Apologies. It's been a long few nights. Give me just a moment.\]"

James just stared at the odd door face. What the hell was going on in his already weird life. It was as he wondered this that James heard a commotion on the other side of the door. After a moment the eyeball and mouth looked almost like they wanted to smile. James didn't like that.

"\[Ah. Here we are.\]" It said as James heard a lock being undone on the other side. "\[Bye Bye.\]" The door face said as it returned to its inert form. Then the door opened, and a rather sleep deprived Veliry was standing in its frame.

"Oh." She said, clearly still waking up. "It's you. Good morning James." She said before yawning.

"Morning Vel." He said, doing what he could to avoid yawning as well. "We're supposed to be submitting the research to my people."

"Yeah yeah." She replied. "Come on in. I've got some wake up tea somewhere around here. Not that you need it." She grumbled.

James furrowed his brow as he stepped in. "What do you mean by that?" he asked as she began rummaging through a cluttered table of ingredients. "Also, what the hell was up with that door?"

"I mean that the princess was here about thirty minutes ago asking for some rather interesting things." She said, then she turned and stared him in the eyes. "So I already know how much rest you two got." This caught James off guard. Apparently, when she was sleep deprived, Veliry lost all of her shy prudishness that she'd had when he asked about her fling in the camp.

"Ah. Right." Was all he managed. "About that?" He began.

"Don't ask." She countered. "Most of the women in the army learn that spell at some point. Ooh! There we are." She said as she found what she was looking for. "Helps with the long deployments and drawn out battles, especially sieges." She continued, as though nothing happened.

"That makes sense I suppose." He admitted, and it did. "Now. The door?"

She stared at him for a moment as she absent mindedly used some fire magic to get a tin water boiling in her hand. Then she realized what he meant.

"Oh. The door. Right. That's probably weird to someone that's never seen one." She said as she dropped the tea bag into the now steaming water. "It's a bespoke mimic door." She said casually as she steeped the tea. James thought the tea smelled very familiar. But it couldn't be what he thought it was. "Lots of mages, especially those with secrets to guard, end up making one. Anyone I don't know tries to open it and they're liable to lose a hand." She sipped the tea, testing its flavor, then went

back to steeping. "Or even a whole arm. " She saw James's worried expression. "Oh, don't worry. Your medallion lets it know that you're allowed in."

"Oh. Okay. Super weird." He said, still unsure of the door. "By the way. What kind of tea is that?" He asked. "It smells like a drink I know from back home."

"It's just standard wake up tea." She replied.

"Do you mind if I try a sip?" He asked. He hoped his sense of smell was correct.

"Sure." She said, handing him the tin cup. "But you better not waste it. That stuff is expensive."

James took the offered cup gently and lifted it to his nose. Sure enough it smelled exactly the way it should. He took a small sip. He almost dropped the cup in shock.

"Veliry." He said gravely. "How long have you had access to coffee?"

"To what?"

Thus began a rather long argument between James and the diminutive mage. Eventually James would end up going back to his room and rummaging around until he found the remnants of the MRE that he'd had in it. When he did he dug out the little packet of instant coffee that he'd squirreled away for desperate times. Veliry had been amazed that he access to "wake up tea" that didn't even require heat or filtering to be drank. James assured her that compared to the real thing, the instant stuff was garbage.

Eventually though, James and Veliry agreed to work together to improve Coffee for the masses. Veliry's "wake up tea" was pathetically weak, in James's opinion. Veliry on the other hand assured James that in stronger mixes it was almost unpalatable. James assured her that he could show her many fantastic ways to brew the elixir so that it could be stronger AND tastier. He even put his title of employee of the week at Dunkin Donuts on the line. She didn't know what that meant, but he assured her that it was a most honorable title in his world. He didn't mention that he'd gotten fired two weeks later for getting caught smoking weed with a Starbucks barista from two doors down in the strip mall.

After the heated debate about coffee James unfortunately had to actually get to work on the task at hand. Veliry showed him to the room she'd made for the research notes. James blanched at the sight of the numerous books and scrolls and sheets of loose paper that were scattered all over the massive table.

Might as well get this over with. He thought. *It has to happen.*

By the time the sun had gone down, and well after James's eyes and thumbs had become sore from reading and typing on his phone, He'd managed to get

a third of the way through the pile. Veliry had kept the "Wake up tea" in steady supply. At one point James asked her to put four of the bags into his cup at once, and to heat it up to just shy of boiling. It finally made a cup that he could tolerate.

As he slowly slouched his way back to his room afterwards he realized just how much work he had ahead of him.

Oh god. He thought. *It really is suicide via PowerPoint. I'm gonna die.*

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When he finally returned to the room, he did so to find Kela in a most upsetting situation. She was sitting at her dining table, and James couldn't help but be a touch upset at what sat in front of her.

"Dude." He said as he entered, causing her to fumble the offending item. "You guys made more burgers and you didn't even bring me one?"

Kela smiled awkwardly. She had mustard and a bit of cheese on her face.

"Evening?" She said awkwardly. "Sorry?"

James was too tired to care. He simply walked into the room. "I'm glad you guys liked em." He said as he opened the door. He was happy to see his clothes returned and sitting, folded, on his bed. He'd given them to one of the attendants when he'd gone to take a bath.

"They brought those by about ten minutes before you got back." Kela said from the other room. James could tell that she had her mouth full. "They said to let you know that they were able to mend the buttons on your pants. What's that about?" She asked him.

James winced silently where he stood. "Uhhh. Nothing." He replied. "Had a bit of an issue with a door handle. It got caught on one of the belt loops. No big deal. Just a tad embarrassing."

"Hmm." She said, before audibly swallowing her current mouthful. "Happens. Jurl and I spoke to his friend with the restaurant today." She added.

"Yeah? He like the burgers?"

"Indeed. In fact, that's where this one came from." She bundled up the paper that the burger had been wrapped in and threw it in the basket she'd carried it in. "He's very excited to begin selling them. He also requested that you be there when they unveil them. I told him I would ask you."

James had flopped onto the bed face first and was just trying to keep his eyes from exploding. "Yeah. Yeah, that sounds fine." He said into the comforter.

"Well." She said, now standing in the frame of his door. "It's gonna be in about a week. He wants to experiment with some different ingredients, and figure out pricing. He'll contact us when he's got a set date." She looked at him curiously for a moment. "Are you okay?" She asked.

"Yeah." He said into the comforter again. Then he rolled onto his back slowly. "Today we sent the first of the research notes back to my people. My eyes, fingers, and brain just feel like they're going to explode." He crossed his arms over his face, blocking out the light. "On the up side; you guys have coffee. We just have to improve it." He added.

"Coffee?"

"You call it wake up tea. Super weak name by the way. But we'll work on it." He replied.

"If you're not feeling good I could fetch the sleep priestess again." She offered. "Or perhaps you could spend the night with Amina again?" She said with a grin.

Beneath his arms James's eyes shot open in surprise. Carefully, he peaked out from around his elbow.

"You know about that?" He asked cautiously.

"Please." Kela said, staring at him. "She was practically floating around the parade grounds today while we were prepping the award ceremony squad. If I'd been full furred I bet I would've smelled it on her."

James cringed at that as he hid back within his arms.

"Relax." She said as she turned back into her room. "You two are officially betrothed. It's normal for you to spend time together. Even nights." She peaked back in for just a moment. "But you'd better take good care of my friend." She warned, while glaring at him. But she also smiled while she said it. Overall it was kind of a creepy expression. Then she was shutting the door, not breaking eye contact until it was shut.

James just groaned as he sat up and began to get changed for the night.

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"Arroyo and Lucas are reporting successful transit ma'am." The captain told her as she sipped at the luke warm, burnt coffee. "They've arrived at the same spot as previous entries, and are setting up base camp. Looks like the tree cables were a good idea. Vickers went and checked the next day, and said that there was no way the locals would spot them."

She swallowed the last of the coffee and crumpled up the paper cup.

"Good." She replied. "Any word on his trip?"

"He's meeting with a traveling trader. He's going to use some of the coins to pay his way. Unless he can work something else out." The captain checked their notes again, tapping at the tablet's screen a few times. "Rough estimate should have him starting sometime before week's end. He also sent us these."

The captain turned the tablet to show her a short video of a shield that seemed to be pulsing with orange energy.

"What the hell's that?" She asked. She wouldn't deny that it interested her. Much as she hated to admit it.

"Uh. He calls it the Worm's Kiss? Wyrms Kiss? Whatever, it's an enchanted shield. Cost a good chunk of the gold and silver we sent him." The captain tapped something else before holding it up to her again. "I'd say worth it though."

The video showed Vickers placing the shield against a tree. Then he stepped back and threw a rock at it. The shield flared with orange light, and Vickers grunted as he dove to the ground to avoid the rock being sent back at him. It hit the tree behind him hard enough to embed itself in the bark, which almost immediately began to smoulder.

"What in the hell?" She asked.

"Apparently it has what Vickers is calling a 'Return to Sender' ability. As you can see it also super-heats whatever hits it." She was about to ask if Vickers had tried something else when the captain beat her to the chase. "Keep watching."

On the screen Vickers drew his pistol from its hidden holster inside his jacket. From another pocket he pulled its suppressor out and quickly locked it into place. He held the pistol out away from his body, and angled it toward the shield. After a second he pulled the trigger and there was a loud pop. The second he did pull the trigger he also quickly pulled his hand, and the pistol, out of the way.

Sure enough the shield flared again, and then the footage went into slow motion, likely added by the techs after seeing it for the first time, and she saw the bullet flying back towards where it'd come from. Only it was so hot that it looked almost like a tracer.

After a few moments the camera was picked up and aimed back at the tree that the stone had hit earlier. Where the 'bullet' had hit, there was a scorch mark, as well as some splattered copper and lead that sizzled against the bark.

"Um." The captain said, drawing her attention from the pad. "Vickers stated that the bullet had been all but melted before it ever hit the tree. He got a bit of light burning on his back, but nothing serious. But the shield did send it back at him."

"So their magic can counter our weapons?" She asked.

"To an extent. Yes. Vickers stated that bullet penetration would likely function as expected against normal shields and armor. But enchanted things, like the shield, might just be a problem from a tactical standpoint."

"Good to know." She said. Then she put her hand on her chin and thought. The captain stood where he was, tapping at the pad some more.

After a few minutes she spoke again.

"Vickers is going to be out of contact for roughly a few months, unless he finds something quicker." It wasn't a question, more of a statement.

"Yes ma'am."

"I know that Arroyo and Lucas are mainly focused on gathering general info. But see what they can learn about these enchanted items. We'll give em as much money as they need. We need more info on this though. If they can stop bullets, then they're a problem." She said. "That'll be their secondary objective after initial setup."

The captain typed on his pad. "Understood ma'am." He waited for more. But after a second she just waved him out. He nodded and left.

She jiggled the mouse on her desk, waking up her computer. Then she pulled up the video he'd just shown her. He was good about making sure she had free access to that kind of stuff before she asked for it.

She watched it again. Frame by frame.

I'd be amazed if that thing was made out of anything fancier than plain old steel. She thought. *And yet it took a hit from a .45 and didn't even get a scratch. Then sent the damn bullet back. That alone would revolutionize our combat doctrine.*

It was a lot to think about.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sdlsk2/wait_is_this_just_gate_73/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (71/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sac4gu/wait_is_this_just_gate_70/) /
[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Back to pieces moving on the board. For those of you who read the pancake section, I'm glad that you guys seemed to enjoy it. For those of you who didn't read it, don't worry I made sure there was nothing "Mission Essential" to the story in there. Just good old-fashioned smut.

(imagine this next bit in Jeremy Clarkson's voice)

In tonight's episode! Vickers uses a cheatcode. The blonde man has weird feet. And James attempts to wear some pants.

All jokes aside. Enjoy.

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In his life James had woken up to the mountain hot springs, the rings that orbited this planet, a flower covered balcony of a castle, the jade and marble structures of Jadesport, and (back on Earth) the summit of Mt. Fuji. These views of different, fantastic, sunrises had formed some great memories for him. Hell, even the most diehard night owl couldn't deny the beauty of a sunrise.

To James though, those sunrises all took second place to how he woke up this day. It could have been a terrible start to the day. He'd woken up from a nightmare. He couldn't remember what about, but it had been enough for him to jolt awake in a panic. Only Amina's stirring had brought him back to the present. Her hand unconsciously groped for him after he'd woken up. He quickly settled himself back down and kissed the hand before placing it back on his chest.

Last night had been incredible. James and Amina had finally given in to their desires and spent the night in bed, but not asleep. He was still sore all over from the exertion, and his head pounded lightly with a dehydration headache. Still, he knew that it was worth it.

I just hope that that spell she mentioned does what she implied it would. He thought.

He laid that way for a while, awake but not wanting to disturb her sleep, until eventually the guards outside sounded the morning horns. The sound caused her to wake, she immediately tried to lift herself up, digging the palm of her hand into his chest unexpectedly.

"Ow!" James yelped, startled more than anything.

"\[Huh? Oh gods, James!\]" She whispered before a yawn and stretch stopped her. "\[I'm sorry.\]" She said, forgetting that he couldn't understand her.

"All good." He replied, catching the tone of an apology easily. "Just a reflex."

"Hmmm?" She wondered as she yawned again.

He kissed her on the forehead and then gently edged his way off the side of the bed and searched for his medallion. After a few moments of trying to remember where it'd gone, he found it under his pants and placed it back on his neck. He crawled back over to Amina's side of the bed and popped up, startling her.

"Better?" He asked, while crossing his eyes and donning his goofiest smile. Amina laughed and grabbed his face.

"Much better." She said as she kissed him. James kissed her back, his hand finding its way to her hip as he did.

"Mmmmmm. No.." He said as he broke off. "Stop. We have stuff to do."

"Do we have to?" She asked in a pouty voice.

James planted his elbow on the side of the bed and rested his head on his hand as he looked at her.

"Sadly? Yes." He replied. "I have to help Veliry send all that research data to my people. Plus aren't you supposed to do some... thing with the army today?" He asked. Then he whispered. "Plus, that spell you talked about. Last night?" He said as he shifted his hand from her hip to her stomach.

She groaned in annoyance as she rolled onto her back and rubbed her eyes.

"Mmmmm. Don't worry about that. I can get the supplies for that from Vel. And yes, the award ceremony." She groaned. "For the soldiers that helped rescue us. Plus the healer from Portview. Plus, Kela's promoting some of the troops."

"Sounds fun." He joked. "Ribbons and cake and, I'm guessing, swords and stuff?" He mused.

"Cake would be an improvement." She admitted "Still sounds better than submitting research. How are you going to do that anyways?"

James let out a long sigh. "I have to go through every book, journal, hastily scribbled note, and whatever else and snap pictures." He sighed again. "AND type short summaries of what each one is before sending them."

She looked at him with genuine pity. "That sounds terrible." She said at last.

"It will be." He agreed.

She rolled over and wrapped her arms around his neck. "Sorry." She said.

He fake sobbed, drawing a chuckle from her. "It's like the opposite version of death by PowerPoint." He said. "Or maybe it's suicide by PowerPoint? Suicide via creating a PowerPoint?" He wondered.

Amina pulled back as James spiraled into his joking pity party. She just looked at him curiously with an eyebrow raised.

"Should I know what a PowerPoint is?" She asked.

"Be glad you don't." He responded. "Speaking PowerPoints though. Does your head hurt?" He asked.

"It does throb a touch." She admitted. "Luckily I only have to worry about half as much light as before." She joked.

He nodded and laughed. "We should get breakfast, and lots of water.

"You'll need to go get some new pants first." She said with a smirk.

"Yeah. Thanks for that by the way." He said with a similar smirk as he started standing up. "Super hot, that you did that. Just.... you know, for the record. Not very practical though." Once he'd stood up, he held his hand out to her.

"What can I say?" She said as she let him help her up. "I was excited. You made me wait over a week."

"Touche"

"What?" She asked, confused at the foreign word.

"Nothing. Let's get..... as dressed as we can. I guess." He replied. "Also..." he added as he looked at her again. "You just joked about your eye. That's progress."

"Oh, shut up." She said as she pushed him toward his pants.

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Vickers walked back into town with a bit of a hop in his step.

On his belt was a nicely crafted steel rapier. Courtesy of his blacksmith friend. And on his back rested the Wyrm's Kiss shield. Also, courtesy of the same blacksmith.

But, as much as obtaining them had raised his spirits. The fact that he still had an incredibly full purse only raised it more.

Command hadn't been a big fan of his idea. But they'd had no choice but to admit that, given the circumstances, they hadn't had many other options. His pictures had been used to make several 3D prints of the coins he'd pictured. Then they'd made numerous molds, some intentionally imperfect, and then poured hundreds of each coin. Hell, they'd made almost a thousand of the brass coins.

It had taken them nearly four days to complete the whole set and send it back through. Vickers had had to exercise extreme caution in going to retrieve them too. In those few days Taman's story had reached town, and a small party of the town guards and some local hunters had been combing the woods since then.

But compared to some of the people Vickers had needed to sneak past on Earth, they were downright amateur hour. Plus, they'd helped confirm that

he'd hidden the base camp well enough. He'd watched as several of them had walked directly beneath several of the bundles and never saw them. Hell, one guy had even looked almost directly at one when a bird had called from the tree canopy. Still the hunter hadn't noticed anything.

The next day Vickers had snuck back out and sent the "all clear" signal. Ten minutes later, he'd had a nice fat bag of coins in his hand.

Now he was walking toward the other drinking establishment in town. Klenan had sent his apprentice running (crutching, technically) to Vicker's room to let him know that the trader had arrived in town. The two of them were going to be doing business at the Hopping Hydra, a pub at the other end of the main road. It'd be a good time to introduce the freshly equipped traveler with the trader and see if they could reach an arrangement about going to the capital.

That had sounded swell to Vickers. He was excited to begin the trip as soon as he could.

Especially since now, there were two new additions to the camp. He expected that by the time he returned, assuming he needed to, they'd have quite a nice setup waiting for him.

Yes. Things seemed to be progressing quite nicely now that the people back home had gotten the power problems figured out.

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The blonde man watched James and Amina wake up from the top of the nearby castle tower. It was one of the few blind spots he'd managed to find in the castle defenses. Compared to the guards back at the blighted area, these guards were much more disciplined, and he'd had trouble sussing one out.

But the top of this tower did the trick. It was situated at one of the concave sections of the wall, and while patrols did pass under it, the ones that passed by in the courtyard beneath were obstructed by a well sized smeplie tree. As a result, he could sit here all day. Unless someone looked out their window, they wouldn't see him. Even then, he had a concealing cloak on, all they'd see if they did was the same pattern as the tower's roof.

The cloak was one of the most useful things he'd gotten from the crooked shopkeeper. All one had to do was lay it against something, say its activation phrase, and it would perfectly mimic the pattern of what it had been laid against. Then you'd flip it around and put it on, and you'd be almost invisible unless someone was up close or saw you from the side. Between that and a stolen guard uniform, getting to this spot had been a piece of cake.

Now as he watched the young couple dress and move out of view, he knew that his time was up. The sun was rising, and his concealment would be less effective. Besides, he'd seen what he needed to see and had

confirmed his suspicion about the two of them. The rumors of betrothal between the two of them seemed true.

Even better. He thought. *Oh, how the people's hearts will just shatter when I'm done.*

With that thought he shifted his feet back to their normal forms. The claws that had been holding him firmly in place on the roof melded back into his flesh. Human toes took their place as he grabbed onto the edge of the roof with his hands. He checked once more to make sure that none of the patrols were approaching, then rolled into the tower's top room.

The archer that he'd knocked out was still there. He pulled a bottle of liquor from his bottomless bag, took a swig, poured some on the soldier, and then dropped the nearly empty bottle near her hand. Then he pulled the concealing cloak off and slipped it back into the bag. Walked over to the opposite side of the room, and jumped out the window.

There's a royal banquet in four days. He thought. *What a great way to celebrate a tragedy.*

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/scopno/wait_is_this_just_gate_72/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (70.5/?) (Pancakes subchapter)

Writer's note: I've never cooked pancakes before. I hope you guys enjoy it. And if you don't? Well, like I've said before; they'll be few and far between.

Anyways, here we go.

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James closed the door behind him and walked into Amina's chamber.

He'd never been here before, and he didn't really know what to expect of it. Unlike Kela's room it didn't have a bunch of armor in the foyer. But James didn't have time to focus on that.

Amina grabbed him by the front of his shirt and pulled him into another kiss. James wrapped his arms around her as they joined. They began stumbling towards the door to her actual room, not breaking the kiss for a second.

As they entered, they spun around and Amina pushed James onto a large, stuffy, chair. James plopped down onto his butt and watched as she began to untie the front of the vest she was wearing.

"What are you waiting for?" She asked. "I shouldn't be the only one undressing."

James quickly began unbuttoning his shirt. Just as he began removing it Amina sat on his lap, legs on each side of him. She threw the vest to the side and the shirt underneath opened as she reached down and placed her hands on James's bare chest.

James grabbed the medallion off of his chest and pulled the cord from around his neck. He was about to throw it onto her vest, and Amina was about to kiss him again, when he paused. With his other hand he held her back for a moment.

"What's wrong?" She asked. She looked concerned as she said it.

"Nothing." He reassured her. "I just want to say something before you can't understand me."

"What is it?" She asked with a smirk.

"That first day I was here." He began. "After I woke up, right before you punched me."

"Yeah?" She prompted.

"The first thing I thought when I saw you. You know, before the punch, was. 'Woah, she's fucking gorgeous'." He admitted.

"Really?" She asked, as a large smile broke out on her face.

"Yeah. You were- No.... ARE the most beautiful woman I've ever-" She interrupted him with a kiss, and slapped the wrist holding the medallion, causing it to fall to the ground.

"\[Enough talk. You've already won me over.\]" She said. James didn't understand most of the words she said. But he did know the word for talking.

That was all he needed to get the message.

He stood up suddenly, startling her with how strong he was despite being shorter than her. She wrapped her legs around his waist as he placed his mouth on one of her nipples and lightly bit and sucked on it. He couldn't help but notice the scar that went from her right collar bone down to her left ribs. He'd seen it before, but never so close. The sudden sensation of the bite made her gasp, and wrap her arms around his head, as he turned and walked toward the nearby bed.

He dropped them both down on the bed, him on top of her, then he stood up and removed the shirt all the way. Amina shrugged out of hers as she sat up. Then she returned the favor and nipped at James's nipple. He shuddered in surprise, but before he could say anything she'd pulled him close and kissed his neck. Her arms reached around him to hold him in place. That was when her hands landed upon the long, ragged, scar that crossed his back. The one he'd gotten trying to save her.

She traced it as she rose up to kiss him. As she did his hand found its way down to her breast and cupped it. He squeezed it gently, but with enough force to make her take a breath. Then, suddenly, he pushed her onto her back and grabbed at the waist of her trousers.

She went to help him. As he began fumbling with her belt, she began to untie the strings beneath it. But before she could finish, he'd undone the belt, then he simply grabbed the waist of her pants again and yanked abruptly. The pants slid off easily and bared her to him as she kicked them off to the side.

Instinctively she tried to cover herself, but then she stopped herself. James looked at her.

"Are you sure?" He asked. She knew, without understanding the words, what the question meant.

She nodded yes. When she did, he leaned forward and planted a kiss on her lips. Then he stood back up.

She'd expected him to remove his pants too. But instead, James dove to his knees suddenly and planted his face between her legs. He wrapped his arms around her legs, and planted his hands on her thighs, holding them apart. Then she felt his tongue.

Before she knew what was happening, he'd begun licking at her gently but quickly. The sensation was unlike anything she'd ever felt before. Literally, she'd never had anyone do this to her before. Without realizing what she was doing Amina moaned, and her hands moved to grip the hair on top of James's head.

James explored her with his tongue. She had hair, not that he was surprised, but he didn't let that slow him down. He lapped at her lips eagerly and rubbed his nose over the little nub at the top of them. Each time he did he felt her hands tightening their grip. And when he moved up a bit and lightly nibbled it, he felt her back spasm and arch as she let out a low moan. When she did, he backed up just a bit and blew on it before going back down. She shuddered again.

After a few minutes she pulled at his hair violently enough that James had no choice but to lift his head up. She was breathing heavily, and he could see bruises forming on her lower lip.

"That good huh?" He asked, also breathing heavily. "I can keep-Ah!" he yelped as she pulled him on top of her and into another deep kiss. While they kissed, she quickly undid his belt and then grabbed the sides of the button fly and ripped the buttons clean off.

James didn't need to be told what that meant. He kicked his pants off to the side, then looked back at her.

With a grin, he thrusted into her.

Her arms reached around him, and her hands sunk into the meat of his shoulder blades as she let out a gasp.

Slowly, James went deeper, easing into her as she wrapped around him.

"Fuckin' hell." He said in between breaths. She grunted in agreement with the foreign words.

"\[Go.\]" She said."\[Start.\]"

So James did. He started slowly at first, pumping up and down once every few seconds. Amina's breath quickened for a moment as he pulled back the first time, then she gasped again as he went back in. He continued at that pace for a few more pumps. Then Amina gripped his butt and pulled him in. Her other hand held onto the back of his neck.

So he sped up. The sound of their bodies slapping against each other reaching a higher tempo until eventually James had to slow down.

Under other circumstances James would have done what he could to last longer. As it was, they'd only been going at it for about ten minutes. But it had been months since James had had any kind of release. So, before he knew it, he was ready to climax.

He increased his speed, and bit down on Amina's shoulder as she gripped him. Then, right as he was about to cum, and to her surprise, he pulled out.

The hot, sticky, load sprayed onto the side of her thigh as she realized what was happening. She wanted to ask what he was doing, but she was still coming down from the orgasm she'd been riding for the past minute or so.

James lifted his head and planted a kiss on her cheek as she gathered her mind. Then he flopped down on the bed next to her, breathing heavily.

They lay like that for several minutes as they recovered, Amina on her back, and James lying next to her on his stomach, his arm draped across her chest. Eventually Amina rolled over to look at him curiously.

"\[Why did you do that?\]" She asked, pointing at the mess he'd left on her leg.

James was still breathing heavily. But he understood what she was asking. He moved his hand down to her stomach and patted at it. Then lifted it, miming pregnancy.

"Didn't wanna cause any more diplomatic nightmares." He said jokingly. "Not yet anyways. Maybe after the big wedding."

She chuckled as she shook her head. Then she turned back to him and held her hand up. She focused a bit of magical energy, just enough to make her fingertips glow a little bit. Then she let the magic fade as she placed the hand over his, on her belly.

"\[Not something you need to worry about.\]" She assured him.

He got the message then too.

"Right." He said as he rolled onto his side and pulled her in close to him. "Right. Of course, you guys have a magical version of Plan B. Why wouldn't you?" She looked at him curiously. He just shook his head at her questioning look. Then he glanced down at his already returning erection.

She followed his gaze. Then looked back up at him with a smile.

Before either of them could say anything else, she was on top of him.

He lasted a lot longer that time.

And for the rest of the times that night. Until neither of them could move their arms or legs without shaking.

[\[Alright, back to the rest of the story\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sac4gu/wait_is_this_just_gate_70/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (70/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/s9jigg/wait_is_this_just_gate_69/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: The day has finally arrived. Wish me luck.

And enjoy.

\~

Cheeseburgers were, at least for now, James's greatest victory since coming to this world.

Everyone had gathered in the kitchen to bear witness to the culinary creation. James had tasked Mela and Tilo with chopping the tomatoes, potatoes, and onions, as well as shredding the green sheets, which were the closest analogue James could find to lettuce. They were actually spot on flavor-wise, they just grew flat instead of round, which weirded James out until he'd tried one.

Jurl helped him flatten the patties, which were a mixture of ground ox beef and a bit of ground ham. Lastly, Kela and Amina were tasked with helping cut the buns and the cheese. James had managed to find cheddar, something that he thought was a havarti, and bleu cheese, although it would've been more accurate to call it red.

Once everything was prepped James and Jurl had manned the wood stove in the kitchen. James hadn't paid much attention to the kitchen the last few

times he'd been here. But the stove was actually pretty cool. It was effectively a massive cowboy grill set on the side of the kitchen. Jurl had several metal sheets made to fit over it when it needed to be a flat top. The flavor that it put into the patties and bacon was delicious. The only thing that had been difficult, or at least James had been cautious about it, was heating up the oil for the fries. But Jurl had kept that under control for him, and the whole meal had come out perfectly.

While everything was cooking James took the last few ingredients and made some good old-fashioned mayonnaise, and he attempted to make mustard. It came out a bit on the red side, but the flavor was close enough for government work.

For the short time that they'd spent eating James had felt like he was back on Earth again. It had almost moved him to tears as he'd closed his eyes and savored the startlingly familiar flavor. Then Amina had leaned over and whispered in his ear about how delicious the burgers were. He'd opened his eyes and looked around to see everyone enjoying the meal.

It was a great sight for the displaced young soldier.

"James." Jurl said before lightly burping into his napkin. "This is.... delicious. Is all the food from your world this good?"

James chuckled a bit. "Uh. No. No not all of it. But there is a lot of good stuff."

"You must teach us some more." Jurl said. "I have a friend. He's actually the one who helped me get that stove-grill. I helped design his restaurant. I think he would be very happy to learn of this recipe."

"Well, he's more than welcome to it if you wanna give it to him." James replied. "Long as I get to eat for free any time I go over there."

Jurl smiled. "I think that could be arranged." He reached over and wiped some of the mayonnaise off of Tilo's cheek. "Especially if you showed off any other recipes."

"I'll think about it." James replied. "I don't think the king, or my higher ups for that matter, would appreciate it if I ruined the restaurant economy." He joked.

Then Mela piped up. "If I get more burgers, I don't care what else happens!" She exclaimed, causing laughs around the table.

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A few hours, and a few bottles of wine and ale later, James and Amina walked back to the castle together, hand in hand. Kela and Jurl had offered to put them up for the night. But they decided to let Jurl and Kela have some alone time. It had been roughly a month since they'd seen each other after all.

They opted to ignore the stares of the people around them as they walked. Though James did take a second to lament the way absolutely everybody in the city seemed to know about their betrothal. He'd just have to get used to it though.

"That was delicious James. Thank you." She said as she leaned into him a bit.

"Oh, that was nothing. We have places that serve those all over the place in my world." He replied.

"Mmmm. If only I could visit someday." She mused.

"Same." James said, only half joking.

They walked in silence for a moment, taking in the chill of the night air as they passed by the now closing shops and restaurants.

"I'm glad you're here though." She said.

He thought for a moment. "You know, that might simultaneously be the nicest, AND meanest thing you've ever said to me. And you punched me in the face the first time we ever met." He said with a chuckle. She slugged him on the shoulder before leaning back into him. "But I think I am too."

When they got back to the castle James walked her to her room. When they got to the door he kissed her, long and deep, with his hands on her waist. He was about to wish her good night. But she beat him to the chase.

"You could stay." She said as she hugged him tight. "If you want."

"You sure that's okay?" He asked. "Your dad isn't gonna castrate me for deflowering you or something is he?"

She pulled back and looked him in the eyes, a serious expression on her face. "First; we're betrothed. So, it's allowed anyways." She said. Then she cocked her head to the side a bit and leaned in to whisper into his ear. "Besides, who said you'd be deflowering me?" She asked.

James's eyes widened at that. Then he looked her in the eyes. She just smiled and turned around to walk through the door.

James stood where he was for a moment. Frozen in place as he thought about what he should do. But he wasn't an idiot. Or was he? He didn't know any more. But he sure as hell wasn't passing up that obvious of an invitation.

"Are you coming?" She asked from inside the room.

He looked around the hallways quickly. "Will be soon." He said as he quickly stepped inside.

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[Pancakes for those of you who want them.](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sac4l2/wait_is_this_just_gate_705_pancakes_subchapter/)

Fun bit of info on the world James is in. They have pancakes. But they call them griddle cakes and they're typically used as a wrap for breakfast on the go. Kind of like crepes only extra thiiccccccc!!!!

Anyways, back to the story.

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Between the people that were already watching them, and their focus on each other, James and Amina didn't notice the blonde man trailing them.

He'd been watching them since they left the castle behind Captain Swiftrunner. He had spent the last few days setting up his lodgings and establishing a line of communication with his employers. He had let them know that he would be making his move soon.

His task was simple enough, and he was allowed to complete it in any manner he chose. But the employer had requested that he go for as much impact as he could. Preferably it would occur in a public setting. But barring that it should at least occur somewhere that would cause turmoil within the royal family. At the end of the day though, simply doing the deed would be enough to receive payment.

The blonde man didn't even know why he still worked with the Agency. He didn't need to. There was no rule saying he had to. Even if there was, he was so far beyond any of the other members that they'd never be able to enforce such a rule upon him anyways. And it wasn't like he needed the money either. Though he had to admit that he liked having it.

He was older than the Agency. Much older. In fact, he'd already been nearly three hundred years old when it had formed. An old acquaintance of his had been the one to request that he join. He'd already grown bored with life as it had been then, so he'd joined more out of curiosity than anything else.

But then he'd found that he rather enjoyed being in this line of work. And he looked forward to completing this job. It wasn't often that the agency got hired for something as bold as targeting a royal family. Especially the one in Petravus.

But worrying about such things wasn't part of the job.

Worrying about this "Summoned Hero" on the other hand. That was part of the job.

He'd read about the young, odd looking, man in the news when he'd first arrived in the capital. But that article had been a month old and didn't have updated information. He'd heard tales of the battle with the grabber clan before he'd ever hidden in their mage's carriage. He knew that the

man was an able warrior, and apparently a startlingly potent mage, if a bit amateur. He also knew that he had somehow bested the prince in ritual combat. Not a terribly impressive feat, but apparently the nature of the victory was one of great curiosity to the blond man. This "pistol" that the hero had touted, concerned him.

And as if all that wasn't enough. The little "hero" had a drake, and a large one at that.

He disliked drakes immensely, and all other dragon-kin for that matter.

And now, as he watched the princess and the young man walking down the street he knew, without any doubt, that the "hero" would be an obstacle for him. Additionally, seeing the princess hugging his arm, he also knew that it would be difficult to get to the princess without him being present.

The blonde man's smile faltered a bit as he made these observations.

He hated unknown factors.

But he had no doubt that his employers would be okay with him removing this particular one. After all, they were trying to destabilize King Farrick, and get a bit of vengeance in the process. Removing their summoned hero could only help in that regard.

He watched for a moment as they began to walk through the gate to the castle. Then he kept walking down the road past them.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/sc8eyr/wait_is_this_just_gate_71/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (69/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/s8tssb/wait_is_this_just_gate_68/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: No pancakes today. I know that's what y'all expect given which chapter this is. But I've said it before, and I'm saying it now. I have no plan, I begin typing and let the story develop from there. They are on their way though. In short, sorry-not-sorry.

Now enjoy some wholesome cheeseburgers.

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James sat down in the chair in his room and pressed the palms of his hands into his eyes as he slumped down as low as he could get, legs splaying outward. He groaned, long and loud. Amina sat down on the corner of his bed a few feet away. She was doing what she could to keep her emotions off of her face as she stared at the ground.

They'd just returned from a rather long, rather hot tempered, berating from her father.

Finally James broke the silence as he stared up at the ceiling.

"Betrothed?" He asked, still taken aback at the suddenness with which his life had just been flipped upside down.....again. "We're betrothed?"

"I'm sorry." Amina said meekly as she fiddled with the edge of a piece of her armor. "I should have known he might do something like this."

"But betrothed?" James asked again. "We just started dating like, a week ago." He sat up and looked at her. "And now we're betrothed?" He slumped back down. "Oh god. My mom's gonna kill me. How do we just..... immediately jump to that step?"

"Sorry." She said again. "Are you mad?" She asked with a hint of sadness.

James heard the upset in her voice. He sighed. Then he got up and went over to sit next to her. He took her hand.

"No." He said after a few moments. "No I'm not mad. This.... it's just a lot."

She leaned her head into his shoulder. "Sorry." She said one last time.

He leaned back into her. "Quit saying sorry. It's not your fault." He sighed again. "I should've known something like this might happen when I got involved with a princess."

They sat like that for a while. But each of them had duties to get to for the rest of the day, what little there was. Plus Amina would be joining James and Kela for dinner.

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The king had been incredibly upset at the two of them after Amina's outburst. James had turned back to face the king with an incredibly forced smile on his face. The king had simply glared daggers at both of them before pacing back to the desk at the front of the room.

When he'd gotten there he'd gestured at the two chairs in front of it, then he'd sat down at the main chair behind it. James had pulled Amina's chair out for her, he figured he should probably do things properly given the situation, then he sat down as well.

He'd felt like he was back in elementary school getting scolded by the principal. Looking to his side, he could see that Amina had been just as nervous as he had been.

The king had addressed James first.

"Specialist Choi, I need to be honest with you for a moment." He'd said.

James had nodded. "Yes sir?"

The king had sat for a moment, staring at him, thinking about what he'd wanted to say. "Mr. Choi..... James." He began. "I have to admit something to you." He took a deep breath. "After your duel with my son. I was.... awestruck at what your weapon was capable of. I was also deeply concerned about what it meant that a man such as yourself." He gestured at James. "A man who admitted that he wasn't even a terribly exceptional example of his people's military. But the fact that you could defeat my son so capably concerned me James."

"Understandable. Sir." James agreed.

"So I tasked Amina with getting more information from you." The king admitted. "And about your weapons. Using whatever tactics she saw fit."

"I know sir." James admitted. "She's told me as much."

At that the king glanced at his daughter. "Has she now?" Amina looked away.

"Yes sir." James answered. He looked at Amina too."And I willingly went along with it. If I'm honest, it was pretty obvious what she was doing. But also...." He thought for a moment. "Well, let's just say that as much as I love my country... and the Army. I'm not dumb enough to think that they're what you'd call 'NICE' people. Not at the government level anyways."

"Yes. She passed your warning on to me." The king replied. "Still. I want to hear it from you two, here and now, that this is an honest and real thing." He pointed at both of them. "No trickery. And I sure as hell hope that this isn't just two young folk gettin all hot and bothered because they were in a battle together. It can make the blood run hot."

Amina answered first. "Well I wasn't even in the battle really." She started. "But also, I..... I have seen James at.... I think... his emotional extremes. I've also seen what he can do when he's hard pressed for options." She thought for a moment. "And I liked what I saw, or heard of in the case of the battle. And I like that he can immediately return to being himself afterwards." She looked down at her lap. "He's impressed me. A lot." She paused again. "I'd like to see more of what he's capable of. Who he is."

James was dumbfounded. He and Amina had had several heart to heart talks over the past few weeks. But now that he'd heard that he realized that he'd never heard her say anything like that to him. He felt foolish for not having asked her how she felt.

He held his hand out. She looked at it for a moment, and then took it. Then she looked back up at her father.

The king was staring at his daughter. James got the notion that he was trying very hard to keep his emotions in check. Then he turned to look at James.

"And you?"

James didn't really know what to say. How could he even follow up what Amina had just said about him.

"I..." He began. he looked at Amina for a moment, she was watching him eagerly. Then he turned back to the king. "I honestly don't know what to say. Princess Amina just kind of... well she blew my mind a bit there." He admitted. "I... I don't know why I care so much for Amina. I think I could sit here all day and list off things I like about her. But I don't think I could say anything quite as.... poignant as what she just said about me. I'm not that kind of guy." He looked at her again. "But I think I have also seen her at her extremes. All I know is that I don't want to lose her." Then he added. "Ever."

The king's shoulders slumped again as he rolled his eyes and sighed.

"Gods dammit." He said as he got up and began walking to the door. "Fine. I suppose I don't have a choice but to allow-" He gestured at the two of them. "this. But there's going to have to be rules. You're a bloody princess in the royal family!" He exclaimed while pointing at Amina. Then he pointed at James. "And you're a foreign dignitary. In function if not title. So we have to do this according to custom." He grabbed the door handle and opened the door. Kela and a servant were standing outside waiting for them. The king looked at them, irritation plain on his face. "From this point on you two are betrothed to each other! That way I can at least pretend It was my bloody idea." He said in a tone that wouldn't allow questioning. He faced the servant. "You didn't hear that last bit." He said. The servant just nodded their head eagerly. When the king looked at Kela she simply nodded.

Then he walked out and slammed the door behind himself. Leaving the couple to sit there together. James stared at the door, eyes wide, as the gravity of what the king had just said set in.

"What?" he asked. Then he turned to Amina. "What!?"

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After attempting to get over the initial shock of the King's verdict James had needed to show his magic to the people back home. He'd been ordered to document it with his phone and send it to them as soon as he could, as well as in depth descriptions of how he performed the magic.

So he'd gone out to the training yard where there was a bit of space.

On his way there he'd payed a visit to Kraug. The massive orc enveloped him in a bear hug that had left James's bones aching a bit as he struggled to breath. Kraug congratulated him on his victory over the grabbers, and his betrothal to Amina.

James had been incredulous at Kraug's knowledge of that. Kraug had simply shrugged and told James that word travels fastest via gossip. James just sighed and acknowledged that was true in his world too. *Loose lips sink ships.* He thought.

Kraug helped him set up a few dummies in a clear area, away from the training soldiers. Then James set up his phone to record from on top of a small crate. Kraug stayed to watch, excited to see the young soldier use battle magic.

James showed the wind magic first. He started with a few light gusts that ruffled the burlap sacks that the dummies wore. Then he used a slice to cut the arms and head off of one, before using what he was beginning to think of as his "Pneumatic Punch" to burst a hole through its chest.

Then he turned to the remaining dummy. He used a few earth columns to batter it a few times. Then he used the magic to make it move along the ground like he had when filling in Steve and Xhalya's den a few days before. He slid it back and forward a few times, then spun it around rapidly causing the wooden shield to fly off of its arm. Then for the grand finale he used the column spell to send the dummy flying into the air. It flipped about twenty or so feet into the air, then as it fell down another column intercepted it, hitting it in the chest and breaking it in half.

He was very happy that it had gone how he had pictured it going. Especially since he hadn't practiced that particular combo before.

Kraug had clapped him on the shoulder as he walked back to the phone, congratulating him on his magic. Then James picked up his phone and spoke into the camera. He told them about the things he had to visualize and focus on in order to make the magic work. He also admitted that he'd only had the breakthrough with the wind magic while under duress.

Lastly he showed them the new magic that Veliry had got him working on. He held his hand up in front of the phone's camera. He focused for a few seconds, rubbing his fingers together, then after a bit of effort a few sparks burst forth. To him they reminded him of the sparks an empty lighter made when you tried to light a cigarette. Fitting since he was working on fire magic. He was close, but he had to go slow with this one, Veliry had warned him that it was easy to lose control of fire magic so she'd emphasized caution.

He signed off and hit the stop recording button on the phone. Then he sent it to the Colonel.

Before he left James unwound the chain from around his chest and asked Kraug if he could do anything to make it a better weapon for him. Kraug looked at it curiously for a moment, asking if James was sure he wanted to use it as a weapon. James explained how he'd gotten it, and the fact that Artair had suggested it for when he was riding Steve. Kraug shrugged and promised to do what he could. But there was only so much he could do

with a chain. James was more than happy with that. He could do the rest once he got it back.

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James did everything in his power not to think of how much his world had just changed, again, while he, Amina, and Kela walked through the city towards Kela's house. It wasn't an easy task, especially with Amina's arm in his as they walked.

They'd stopped by one of the grocers on the way and picked up a few things that James had thought of to complete the meal. Kela had already been to see Jurl to ensure that he had the rest of the ingredients. But James had forgotten some of the finishing touches. They'd also stopped at one of the toy stores so Kela could get some things for Mela and Tilo. She'd emerged with a stuffed drake and a small bow with a few padded arrows. James could already imagine Mela running around shooting him with the latter.

As they approached James steeled himself for the incoming attack that he knew was coming. He was pleasantly surprised to see the two children running straight for Amina instead of him.

"AUNTY MINA!!!" Tilo yelled as he approached. His sister echoed him. The two children charged Amina, who caught them both eagerly, lifting them up into a big hug.

"Oh!. Look at you two pups!" She yelled. "Gods be great if you get any bigger I'll need to bring Kraug along to lift you up."

James was happy to see that, like their mother, they were effectively human right now. Their fur had faded away to almost nothing, the only hints remaining being around their ears. The ears themselves had dropped down to an almost human level on the sides of their heads, though they were still somewhat pointed. Their teeth were the flat omnivorous teeth of normal people. Their legs were still semi-lupine in shape, but their feet were wider and flatter.

In short; you could see hints of the wolf, but from a distance the children would look as human as any other kids. James was also surprised to find that Tilo was actually a ginger. He had a mop of wavy red hair and freckles all over his face. Mela on the other hand would almost definitely look like her mother when she grew up, James could already see that much.

Jurl walked up behind the two children and embraced Kela in a hug. If it hadn't been for the ears and legs, James thought he would have been right at home teaching a college course. He had a scruffy beard and a pair of black rimmed spectacles resting on his nose. He smiled as he turned to greet James and Amina.

"It's so good to see everyone again." He said as he shook James's hand. "We were so worried when we got word of what had happened. I'm so glad everyone ended up being alright."

Amina hugged him as she transferred the kids to his arms. "It's great to see you Jurl. It's been too long."

Jurl hugged her back and then gestured to her eye. "Sorry to hear about the eye. How are you doing?" He asked.

She shook her head a bit. "It's still useless. But I'm getting used to it." She leaned in and jabbed Mela in the belly. "I can still kick Arty's butt." She said with a grin.

"Come come." Jurl said. "Let's go inside. I'm curious about this recipe James has for us." He said as he began leading them inside. Kela took Tilo from him and began tickling the little ginger were-pup. "Besides." Jurl continued. "We have to celebrate you two's betrothal." He said.

James just held his arms up in a 'Oh, come on!' gesture.

"How does everybody know about that already?" He asked.

"Oh come now James." Jurl countered. "People have ears and lips. That's all it takes. Now tell me. What is a 'Cheez-berger'?"

He followed them inside, Amina smiling as she took his hand. "Only god's gift to people's taste-buds." he said as he walked through the door. "I also brought the stuff to make some of the sauces for them." He added as he closed the door behind him.

Despite the previous stresses of the day, James was looking forward to this dinner. He felt like the weights on his shoulders had been shifted around a bit. He wasn't sure if they were gonna be better or worse. But he had a feeling that a cheeseburger could give him the answers. He was at least willing to find out.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (68/?)

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Writer's note: Debriefs are the funnest thing ever, ask any vet. Verbal Skull Dragging? Less so.

Enjoy.

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Kela smiled as she sat in her room snacking on some salted smeplies and sipping some tea. James had been on the phone for over an hour now.

Rather than spending the previous night relaxing and cleaning the road off of himself, James had spent it reading the messages that his people had sent him while they'd been traveling. His phone had spent nearly twenty minutes dinging and buzzing repeatedly as they'd neared the castle. As it had, James's face had quickly gone from one of happiness, to one of dread and anguish.

Eventually, he'd simply turned it off and slid it into one of his bottomless bags. Then he'd begun smiling. But it had been obvious to everyone that the smile was fake and very, very strained.

Amina had asked him if everything was alright. James had simply assured her that it would be fine. He could read them when they got to their rooms and were able to relax. Then she'd whispered something into his ear. James had smiled some more, genuinely this time, and simply said that it would be a better idea if they put that off for the night. Amina had looked disappointed for a moment, but then had nodded understanding.

And now, Kela was watching as he spoke with his commander on the phone. He'd taken off his medallion, so she couldn't understand him. But as a captain of the guard she knew what it looked like when a low ranking soldier was on the receiving end of a tongue lashing.

If James's expressions and pacing were any indication, then he was receiving one of epic proportions right now.

She just smiled and popped a smeplie in her mouth, savoring the extreme sour flavor for a moment before throwing a pinch of salt in to join it. She lamented how sore her teeth got as they shifted back to their human shape. They'd been bugging her for several days now, so the soft fruit were one of the few things she could tolerate. Luckily this should be the last day before they stopped aching.

She looked forward to dinner with Jurl and the children the next day. Today would be spent on a debriefing with the king. She didn't look forward to that.

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After another half hour or so James let out a frustrated, low, yell in his room. Then he entered Kela's room and slumped into the chair across from her. He slammed his head onto the table and laced his hands over it.

"I take it that they weren't happy with your actions?" She said simply.

James just grunted. Then he grabbed the medallion off of the table, his hand fumbling around blindly for a moment before Kela reached out and slid it into his reach. He slowly sat up and reluctantly placed the necklace around his neck. He let out a long sigh.

"No." He said simply. "No they were not."

"Can't say I blame them." She replied smugly as she swallowed another piece of fruit. "If one of my soldiers had simply left a note on my door saying 'I have to go on a trip for over two weeks, bye.' and then ended up being gone for almost a month." She looked him in the eyes. "I'd probably have him cleaning the latrines for a while."

"I assure you." He said, matching her stare. "That would have been on the table if I weren't in another universe." He slowly grabbed a smeplie and bit into it. He didn't even react to the sourness.

"Do you want some salt for that?" She asked.

"No." He replied. "I think I've had enough salt for the day."

She raised an eyebrow at that, then decided not to question it. "What did they say when you told them that you were nearly killed."

"Something about being a stereotypical Specialist. Plus a few other, more colorful, things about how that was a perfect example of how I shouldn't go off half cocked." He said.

"Half cocked?" She asked, curious at the concept of a man with.... less than normal.

He looked at her curiously, then seeing her expression quickly interjected. "NOT.... that." He said. "It's actually a reference to our firearms. Don't know the origin of it, but I do know that much. Umm. Basically it's a saying for not running into battle unprepared."

"Ah." That made more sense to her.

"Either way." He continued. "They at least shut up for a bit when I told them that I'd learned some magic."

"That makes sense. I imagine your people are very excited about that. Even if they didn't want to admit that you'd done well."

"Yeah. Then I had to tell them that I'd expended most of the ammo they'd given me. Then it was right back to the yelling." He replied. His face took on a dark look. "I could practically feel the Sergeant Major's knife hands through the speaker of my phone. And he wasn't even the one leading the conversation. He was just in the room."

His higher ups have knives for hands? Kela wondered with concern. She decided to change the subject.

"Well, at least you were able to give them some good news." She started. "Did you tell them about-" She pointed at James and gestured toward the door to the hall. "-you and Amina?"

James sighed. "Nah....No no no. Noooo. I think I'll just keep that to myself for a bit." He looked off into the distance, thinking for a moment. "There's already enough jokes about enlisted men sticking things where they're not supposed to."

Kela glared at him at that. Not that he noticed. "You.... haven't yet? Have you?" She asked.

"Hmm?" He realized what she meant when he looked at her. "Oh! Oh... No. Not uh..... We decided to uh. Hold off on that for a bit." He searched for the right words to say to his girlfriend's best friend. "Uuhhhh. We wanted to be in the right state of mind first. Plus I... wanted to make it a special occasion." He admitted, blushing as he did.

Kela considered this for a moment. Then nodded. "Good." She said simply, doing what she could to keep from grinning. "So. What's this dinner that you're teaching Jurl to make tomorrow?" She asked, changing the subject again.

"What?" He asked, still thinking of Amina.

"You told Jurl to gather the ingredients for a meal from your world before we left." She reminded him. "What is it?"

"Oh that." He remarked as he remembered the request all those weeks ago. "Oh it's nothing. It's actually considered a comfort food back home. But it is a full meal. You'll love it." He assured her.

"I can't wait." She said. Then a grin spread across her mouth. James was a little disturbed by the still somewhat sharp teeth in the otherwise human face. "Amina could join us if you like." She popped the last smeplie in her mouth as he caught onto the joke.

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Several hours later, after bathing and dressing, the five of them sat at tables in the King's audience chamber. The king was sitting on the edge of the desk that was situated at the center of the chamber. Behind him sat several scribes with quills, ink pots, and paper.

Kela and Amina were in full dress uniform. Artair was in nicer clothes than James had ever seen him wear. Even Veliry looked less frazzled than usual. James felt under-dressed in comparison. He was wearing his uniform. But he felt like a redneck in an executive business meeting.

The group had been talking for the past hour or so. Kela and Amina had began, recounting the first few days of the trip, uneventful as they were. Then it got to the night of the ambush.

James was effectively useless in this part of the conversation. He'd been the first casualty of the Grabber Clan, and as a result hadn't been able to give any of those details. But the group had told him plenty enough during his recovery.

King Farrick was clearly upset at the notion of the Clan even being present in what he refereed to as "His Forest". He was even more upset at the notion of two of his best warriors and one of his best mages being defeated. He assured them that he didn't blame them, he was mostly mad at

the cowardice of the surprise attack. Much less that they would have the nerve to attack his daughter AND the summoned hero. He cursed the deep dark profusely.

Then they began to recount the events afterwards. How Kela and Steve had worked together to track James and Amina's scents. How Veliry had used communication spells to send word for help. How they'd ignored their own injuries to track down their missing partners.

James also recounted his memory of waking up tied and blindfolded. How he'd hear some of what the orc-thing had said, and as a result how James had learned of Amina's capture and injuries. Then he told the story of how he'd managed to get himself loose only to immediately be accosted by the Grabber Clan members and thrown into a fight.

The King commended their efforts and determination.

That was when the group recounted their separate parts of the actual battle. Kela recounted leaping through the trees and ravaging the members of the clan all throughout the forest. She also told him about Gixelle's battle atop Maxel, how savage the clan mother had been in her zeal to return James and Amina to the party alive.

Veliry spoke of arriving atop Steve, and joining in combat from the air. She told of dodging projectiles and casting spells that killed grabbers, riders, and foot troops with equal lethality. She told how Steve had rampaged beneath her, demolishing the Grabber Clan members and setting the forest ablaze. She began to apologize for no preventing Steve from burning a good portion of the forest down, but King Farrick waved it off. He assured her that he would have burned the whole thing down if it had returned Amina alive, much less James or the others.

Finally James described his desperate, running, skirmish from within the heart of the enemy camp. How he'd taken advantage of the party's distraction to find openings. How he'd adapted to the constantly changing situation around him, utilizing unfamiliar weapons and environment to his advantage. He recounted the desperate struggle to strangle the clan boss from atop his own mount. How he'd been shot without even realizing. Then he told of how Veliry had gotten him his pistol, and how he had spent the remainder of the battle staggering towards Amina, killing any Grabber Clan member that made the mistake of existing in his presence.

Finally he recounted his first use of the wind magic, and how it had obliterated the last few people standing between him and saving Amina.

The king had listened to James's story raptly. Even Artair had leaned closer so he could hear the details of the soldier's vicious struggle to save the gravely wounded princess that they counted as family. The king admitted to being amazed at what they had all managed, especially James. He'd asked Veliry if his magic had really been that strong. Veliry confirmed it eagerly, showing some pride in her student.

They all sat in silence as the last details of the battle were told. Farrick needed a moment to process what he'd just heard. But after a

while he thanked them all for what they'd done. Even Artair, who had simply shown up with reinforcements as everything had been winding down.

Then they continued telling him about the rest of the trip. Their recovery in Portview, then Jadesport itself. The trip to the blight.

Lastly they got to the part where James admitted that he didn't have an answer for the vanishing blight. The king had already suspected that that might be the case, but he thanked James for at least making an attempt. When James told the king about his plan to send what he had recorded, plus copies of the researcher's data, the king agreed to the idea. The way he saw it, if James's people could reopen the door, then maybe they could figure this out too. James admitted that that was his exact thought process too.

With that the debriefing ended. The king thanked them all again, and assured them that a great feast would be held in their honor, and in the honor of the soldiers and civilians that the Grabber Clan had slain. He hugged each of them as they walked out of the room.

But he asked James and Amina to hold back for a moment so he could talk to them.

James knew what was coming.

"So...." The king said as he closed the door behind the exiting scribes. Then he turned back to face them.

James gulped, then took a deep breath as the king turned. He stood up straight and made sure to look King Farrick in the eyes as he did.

Then the king continued. "I understand, from reports from witnesses along the way, that there's been a bit of a development between you two."

James was about to speak, when Amina beat him to it. His eyes widened in shock at how bold she was.

"Father!" She almost shouted, clearly as nervous as he was. "Specialist Choi and I have entered a relationship!" She exclaimed, chin held high.

James looked at her, eyes still wide. *I probably would've been a bit more tactful than that.* He thought.

To his credit, the king just sighed as he slumped his shoulders.

James had a feeling that it was going to be a long day.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (67/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Stuff happens. With people, and places, and things. Not gonna lie, this is a bit of a light chapter. We gotta build up to more action stuff. Pieces must move on the board before people can claim checkmate, or monopoly, or yahtzee or whatever.

Some time within the next few chapters I'm gonna have to start doing chapters devoted specifically to the different characters that are moving around. But I'll start doing that whenever I stop being lazy.

Until then, enjoy.

\~

On the final day of the journey back to the capital it decided to rain.

This wasn't an issue for any of the party members, they all had rain gear. But Steve and Xhalya were a different matter entirely. The two drakes required more than a little coaxing before they were willing to move out of a burrow that the two of them had worked together to make. Even then they were lethargic and irritable.

Artair explained that most drakes disliked the rain. The constant downpour negatively affected their vision, hearing, and their sense of smell. Additionally, as reptiles, the cold of the rain caused them to struggle to maintain their body temperature, forcing them to use their inner fire to stay warm. This was an even worse effect with the currently approaching winter. On top of all that, the dampness in their surroundings made their breath attacks less effective in a fight, something that most drakes were acutely aware of and disliked greatly.

James ended up having to repurpose the tarp from one of their tents into a drake sized rain coat. He lashed it around Steve, much to the drake's discomfort, and used one of the tent floor mats as a head covering, propping it up so that the drake's face would still be covered from the rain, but not blocked by the mat. It was a difficult process, made more so by the drakes hesitance to sit still, but after a while James managed to get it done.

Steve clearly disliked the make shift raincoat. But after a few minutes of staying (relatively) dry while in the rain, he lightened up and was less puffed up. James made a note to have a raincoat custom made for the massive creature, even if he had make it himself.

After getting Steve and Xhalya coaxed out and saddled, Veliry tasked James with filling their burrow. She challenged him to use his new earth magic to fill the hole so that they didn't have to grab shovels. She explained how to alter the focus of the spell from explosive growth to steady repositioning of the dirt. It took a good half hour, but eventually James managed to get a small pile of the dirt to move along the ground. It looked like an old Bugs Bunny cartoon, when the Rascally Rabbit was burrowing under the ground. But it was progress. A few

attempts later and he was moving entire piles (what he thought of as truckloads) of the dirt back into the burrow.

After that it was quick work to seal the large drake den up. Veliry waved her hands, the fingertips and her chest glowing a vibrant green, and the nearby tree and surrounding grass and foliage seemed to grow rapidly. Before James realized what she was doing, the hole had been covered by grass and weeds. James realized that if he hadn't seen it himself he would have never known a massive hole had been dug there.

"Druidic magic." She said simply. "Don't let any druids know I did that. Touchy lot when it comes to their practices." And with that she walked away and mounted her carriage.

"Can I learn some some time?" He asked as she walked away.

"Not from me." She replied, chuckling a little.

With that the five of them set off for the last leg of the trip. Between the rain, their excitement to be home, and their need to get back to their normal duties they all decided to push their mounts a little harder. They wanted to get inside to the warmth of the castle before nightfall, when the cold would really set in and make things truly miserable.

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Their stalker was already at the outskirts of the capital before they got there. He'd spent the night walking along the dark road, relying on his stolen eyes to see clearly in the dark of the night. He'd taken shelter in the boughs of a tree for a few hours before the sun had come up, catching a bit of sleep while he still could.

Once the shops had begun opening up he went to a trader who was on good terms with his agency. He said a few key phrases to the shop keep and a few minutes later had left with a bottomless bag tucked under his new coat. The old uniform jacket he'd been wearing was now safely stowed in the shopkeep's stores of disguises that was hidden in a backroom.

In the bag were a few essentials that any traveler would need. But there were also a few things that he'd requested, things specific to this job. The bottomless bag's expanded space kept anyone from suspecting that he had anything undesirable. In fact, to anyone watching, he simply appeared to be a wandering shopper in a somewhat ratty bluish grey coat.

Once he'd gotten that sorted he found a nice little cafe, one he had visited some eighty years before give or take, and took a seat. It had a nice view of the road into the capital. He ordered a light breakfast and asked if they had any of the recent news posts. The young lady, he thought they might be a granddaughter of the old owner, said they had the last months, but that the new one was still a few days from posting.

He accepted the one they had and began reading it as they brought out his breakfast tea and some toast for him to snack on while he waited for his

meal. As he read the folded sheet of parchment he also watched the road and all the people traveling on it.

There were a few small trading and supply caravans, a small patrol of soldiers, some recovering party goers from the night before, and of course the townsfolk as they began to go to, or return from, work. In short, nothing of interest.

Shortly after his breakfast arrived a light drizzle began to fall. The cafe staff unfolded and tied down the cafe's awning over the small eating area to cover their patrons while they ate.

Eventually he had to accept that they wouldn't arrive in the morning. He hadn't really expected that they would, he'd taken all night after all. Plus he knew that their camp took a minute to even break down and pack up. So he paid his bill, gave back the news post, and decided to meander around the nearby shops.

He had plenty of time to wait for them.

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Vickers had spent several more days gathering info about the area for the analysts back home. They gladly accepted the pictures of the map and the books, and had been poring over the footage of the town and the different signs and people seen milling about.

On day two of being there one of the local blacksmiths, a large and muscular grey skinned person, had approached Vickers due to his size. They'd asked if he was interested in earning a few gold for a few hours work. Vickers had considered the offer, but ultimately he needed money if he was going to make it anywhere, so he accepted.

It had been simple enough, the blacksmith's apprentice had sprained an ankle and the blacksmith needed a shipment of iron and steel ingots moved from a cart into their workshop. Vickers just saw an opportunity for exercise.

But the inside of the blacksmith's shop had been a startling treasure trove of information. He'd seen metals in there that he'd never seen before. Additionally, on the walls were weapons unlike anything he'd seen in the real world. Some of them even glowed with what he could only assume were magical enchantments.

As he carried the ingots in, stacking them in the designated area, he asked the blacksmith about the weapons on the wall. The large grey man was more than happy to go over them with Vickers as the two of them worked. He knew from the way Vickers spoke that he was a foreigner and was excited to show off his wares.

There were axes, swords, spears, warhammers, daggers, scimitars, and all manner of other weapons. Vickers was familiar with most of them, but there were a few that didn't match any of the knowledge he possessed.

What Vickers was most excited about were the metals they were made of, and the enchantments that some of them had.

The blacksmith was excited to admit that he was the only smith in town who could work Scale Shale Steel, a rare steel typically only available if someone had slain or at the very least rode, a dragon. The blacksmith was lucky enough to be drinking buddies with several members of Clan Drakrid. They gave him a few pouches of scales every time they came into town. In exchange, he would use the scales to help forge them arms and armor.

Vickers' ears perked up at that. He knew about the Clan, or at least a little bit. It was the clan that had almost gotten Specialist Choi killed, and then had subsequently recruited him to its ranks using some old fraternity pledge week BS to pressure him into joining.

But before Vickers could ask any more about them the Blacksmith had moved on to showing off a massive shield that glowed red around its edges. He called it the Wyrm's Kiss. He demonstrated what it could do by setting it on a dummy's arm. Then he threw a rock at it. There was a flare of red light, and the room got hot, even compared to the heat of the already running forge. The rock was repelled violently, crashing into the wall opposite of the dummy. It was also burning hot and left a burn mark on the ground where it landed.

Vickers' eyes went wide at that. It was the first magic he'd seen since getting here, and it was more than a little impressive.

The two of them discussed how such things were priced, what other weapons and armor the blacksmith had that were enchanted, and how he planned to sell them. They kept talking long after Vickers had finished his task and received the five gold he'd been promised.

When all was said and done he'd learned a lot. Especially that one of the Clan Drakrid members was due to arrive in town any day now. So would a trader who planned to buy some of Klenan's, that was the smith's name, wares so that they could be sold elsewhere. Maybe even the capital if the roads stayed clear.

When Vickers asked the smith if either of them could be convinced to give him a ride, the smith confirmed that either of them could. So long as he paid, or earned, his way.

And so Vickers ended up stumbling across options for his trip. But still, he needed money. He asked the blacksmith to get in touch with him at the inn if he needed more help, and to let him know if the Clan member or the trader showed up.

Afterwords he returned to his room at the inn and uploaded the footage while typing up a message to the other side of the door. They gave him the go ahead to take whichever option seemed most efficient to him. They also asked him if he needed anything shipped through before he left.

Then he came up with an idea that might fix his money issue.

He pulled a few of the coins out of his purse and grabbed a ruler and a portable analysis kit that was tucked into his bag. Once his pad was recharged he took some more pictures of the coins, and ran some tests. He didn't want to wreck the economy. But he needed money fast, and didn't have a lot of options.

After all, he was here on a mission, not to be a blacksmith's new errand boy.

\--

James and the rest of the party arrived at the outskirts of the capital just an hour or so before the sun would set. They ignored their hunger pangs, opting to snack on some of their rations as they continued riding toward the castle.

As they crossed one of the last bridges before getting to the castle James's phone dinged repeatedly with messages. He cringed at the inevitable shit storm he was about to have to deal with.

But he decided to put that off until tomorrow.

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The blonde man watched them enter the capital from the walk up bar of one of the town pubs. As they passed he requested an ale in a traveler's mug, paid his tab, and loosely followed the party.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (66/?)

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Writer's note: Welcome back everyone, Happy MLK day. Arc 3 begins.....NOW!

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The first few days of the journey to the capital were uneventful for James and the group. On the second day they arrived at Portview. James hadn't gotten to see too much of the place the last time they'd been here. He'd been busy trying to heal up, and too preoccupied watching over Amina, to get out of the healer's home. But now that they were both back on their feet, James found that he liked the small lumber town.

When they arrived one of the children playing outside ran into town letting everyone know that they'd returned. Within minutes the townsfolk

had stopped what they were doing and had gathered around the party. They gave the drakes a wide berth, but as soon as James and Amina hopped off Steve's back they were mobbed by townsfolk.

Word had spread quickly about what had happened the last time they were here. Almost a dozen people had gone missing from Portview due to the Grabber Clan's activities. The people of the town hadn't known what was happening, and attempts to find the missing people had come up with nothing. But in the aftermath of the battle remains, and belongings had been found that had finally given the town closure on its missing citizens.

The town mayor and a few of its other wealthy parties put together a banquet in honor of the members of the party. Several of the families in town even offered to put them up for the night, though they politely declined in favor of staying at the town's Tavern.

A large bonfire was lit, tables were lined up in a circle around it, and several large beasts were skewered and began roasting. The tavern, a small place called the Axeman's Alehouse brought out several large casks of, go figure, Ale. A small troupe of musicians took up instruments and began playing.

Amina, ever the princess, raised a toast to the people of the town for taking them in, as well as the members of the guard that had taken up residence afterwards. She also raised a toast to the town healer, thanking him for saving their lives. Kela chimed in to add her thanks and congratulations. James just sat back and watched the two of them be the leaders that he knew they were. They also gave a somber toast to the fallen, and the townsfolk that hadn't been saved in time.

It was a nice moment, one that saw people cheer for the brave, and go silent for the lost.

After the silence had drawn on for a few seconds there was a loud yell, one with a recognizably princely voice, proclaiming "LET'S PARTY!". Amina and Kela had a momentary look of upset at the interruption, but the town seemed to agree with it, and the music resumed. James even guided the band into a new song and taught the town one of his world's most legendary dances.

By the time everything had died down everybody in town had learned the chicken dance. James and Amina laughed as they danced alongside Kela, whose semi-lupine legs made the whole motion awkward in a hilarious way.

They partied long into the night. But, like any small town party it faded pretty gently. There were no major fights, just a few scuffles. Eventually, people just seemed to scatter to their homes as they got tired of being there. James and Amina retired to their room, excited to get back on the road, and past the site of their initial attack.

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As they passed the site the next day, noting the remains of the tattered camp and the still brown and black patches of grass and dirt where blood had been spilled, James felt Amina grip him tighter. She leaned her head into his back and held him tightly.

He wanted to ask her how she was doing. But when he tried to turn back he felt her grip on him tighten, and felt her head shake back and forth. So he decided to let it go. If she wanted to talk about it she could later. He wasn't exactly in a good mood either.

On the other side of the road, and up on a small hill, the army had set a small camp. Kela rode over on her horse and checked in with them. There were about fifty soldiers total, including five griffin riders, combing the forest for any straggling grabbers. But they expected to be pulled back within the next week. The cave leading to the deep dark had been found and sealed by some of the royal mages, and a guard post was being set over it to ensure nobody tried to reopen it. Other than that, the forest had quieted down. Kela relayed this to them once she'd rejoined, then they went back to riding.

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The rest of the journey to the capital occurred without much incident. Just like the trip to the the blight, they'd ride through the day, stop at any town or village they passed and relax for a bit, then ride until it was dark. At that point they'd set camp, tether the beasts, and relax while they went about camp duties.

Artair, it turned out, was a rather exceptional archer. On more than one occasion he rode Xhalya off into the woods, or over the plains, with his crossbow loaded. He always came back with at least one kill. The first time he'd brought back a massive six legged boar that had enough meat for them AND the two drakes. He'd shot it twice in its head and once in its chest before bringing it down. Another time he'd returned with several rabbits and a bird that looked like the bastard offspring of a turkey and a cassowary. But it had tasted delicious once it had been roasted, so James didn't complain.

He was also a significantly better swordsman than James had even realized during their "duel". during James's training hours the prince took out some of his anger on James, beating him handily every time they sparred. Or at least he did for the first few days.

Eventually Amina stepped into the training area with her bastard sword and dueled Artair. She justified it as being a test of how she could cope with her damaged eye. Kela, James, and Veliry got a different idea after watching her effectively dismantle Artair's flowing, dual scimitar, defense with ease. It was very apparent to James that his new girlfriend was a certified badass with a sword, one eye or not, after defeating her brother, who sulked more than a little as a result.

She added insult to injury by telling him that James was to his fighting skill as he was to hers. That got a laugh from Kela, and resulted in

Artair's face becoming red. James could practically see the steam coming from his ears.

Still, he went easier on James afterwords. He still beat James easily. But he slowed down, and started to explain his movements, his footwork and grip changes, and how James could apply the same moves to his short sword. He also began to actually train James on his drake riding, leading James on charges against phantom enemies, usually trees, and actually recommended that James's chain would be a better weapon. It had the advantage that it could actually reach ground targets from on top of Steve.

On day four James also managed to successfully raise the column of stone that Veliry had challenged him to make. The feeling he had while using Earth magic was very different from using wind magic. He felt stiffer, less like a powerful cannon and more like a grounded battlement. Or at least that was how it translated in his head, and when he explained it Veliry agreed with his description.

James tried to use the magic to send the stump that had Artair's cup of tea on it up a few feet to mess with him. He ended up sending the entire stump flying several dozen feet into the air. The roots upended Artair in his seat and sent him sprawling several yards away. Then he'd had to scramble to avoid the falling stump.

James ended up running from the angered prince for several minutes before Veliry intervened, trapping them both in luminescent bubbles for several minutes. She didn't release them until she was done lecturing James on the safe use of magic. James assured her that he had regretted his foolishness the second he'd seen the stump flying into the air.

At nights James and Amina would sit in their tent and talk. James would remove his medallion and set it aside, then the two of them would go over the words for different things. James had come up with the idea, of all places, during their battle. Technically he'd had the idea when he'd broken Steve. But the battle with the Grabber Clan had cemented the need to become fluent in the language of the world.

They'd started simply. James had held up a cup of water and pointed at it.

"Water." He'd said. Then he'd pointed at the cup it was in. "Cup."

Amina had put her finger in the water *Mud in my eye.* Thought James with a grin.

"Pallar." She'd said. Then she'd tapped the cup with her finger too. "Pal."

He'd repeated the words several times. Then he'd picked up the candle and pointed at the flame. "Fire."

She'd followed suit. "Pyra."

That's oddly close to pyro. He thought.

And so they had been doing since they'd started traveling again. Each night they would learn a few new words from each other's language. It helped that on night five James finally finished the translation book.

When he was finally done, startled at how long some of the sections in the back of the book were, James closed the book. When he did it transformed into a pair of stone tablets, attached at the middle by an indented section. On one tablet was a word in the Petravian language. On the other tablet was a word in his language. It simply said, "WORDS" on it. After it had transformed he carried it over to Veliry and let her know. She'd gotten very excited about that and had grabbed it quite aggressively.

"This is great!" She'd exclaimed. "This will make things so much easier for both our people."

Then she'd said a few words, and brought the tablet down over her knee. It snapped at the thin point, and a little bit of blue light spilled out of each side. James instinctively reached out to stop her. But it was too late. Instead she'd misread his reaching hands and put the one with the Petravian word on it, in his hands.

He looked at it, dumbfounded, then looked at her.

"What do I do with this?" He asked.

She showed him, rather than told him. Before he had any chance to react she'd opened her mouth wide and chomped down on the piece of rock. His face widened with shock, his jaw dropping open, as he saw her do what he just KNEW would result in shattered teeth.

To his surprise, and Veliry's amusement, her teeth went right through the tablet with only a light crunching sound. Then she began chewing. James watched in awe as Veliry's head, and more importantly eyes, began to glow with the same blue light as the tablet had had after she'd broken it.

"Ish awarenesh majik." She said simply as she continued chewing. "Very doffokult to mayke. Shuper ushefull." Then she chomped on another piece of the, apparently edible, stone and James watched as her head glowed again.

"Coulda warned a guy." He admonished. "Thought you'd gone insane or something."

"Eat up." She said as she swallowed the mouthful of magical rock.

James looked at the roughly sandwich sized piece of rock with skepticism. He'd just seen her take a chomp out of hers. But his brain just couldn't fathom that it was edible.

Still, he placed the corner of it in his mouth, and gently bit down while angling it away from him.

Suddenly it broke off in a bite sized chunk, and James was startled to find that the piece in his mouth had taken on an almost rock candy like crunchiness as it crumbled to individual bits. But as surprising as the texture was, the flavor was still..... well... not great.

It tasted like someone had combined one of the chalky daily vitamins he'd taken as a child, with the oily chemical flavor of a broken pen. James chewed the chalky, crumbly, oily, slurry of the tablet with a grimace. Oddly, he didn't feel anything happening, and couldn't see the glowing that his head must have been doing.

But he did what every soldier in every military since the dawn of time had learned to do.

He embraced the suck.

It took nearly twenty minutes, the last fifteen of which were spent with Veliry watching him with a bit of annoyance. But, eventually, he got through it and finished the last piece. He picked up Veliry's wine glass and took a large swig. He hated wine, but it was better than what he'd just gone through.

"So now what?" He asked, as he wiped his lips. "Also. That was disgusting."

Veliry held out a book that she'd pulled from her robes, and he took it. "Let me see your phone. And please, pull up some text on it." She said. James handed it over, with one of his digital books (World War Z-3) opened up. He knew that she already had the pass code. After all, she'd been the one studying it when he'd first gotten here. Then she pulled out a small journal and began referencing it.

While she was looking at his phone, and referencing her notes, he looked at the book she'd handed him. The writing in it still looked just like it always had, no change there.

But the biggest difference was that James could understand it. In fact, he understood them so well that it felt like he'd been reading them his whole life. In his mind they translated themselves into English. He even had an instinctive knowledge of how the words were supposed to be pronounced in their normal language.

He smiled, then ran back to where Amina was. "I'll bring this back!" He yelled over his shoulder. But Veliry was too engrossed in his phone and her notes to notice.

As he jogged he searched the words of the book and found the ones he was looking for. He burst into the tent and immediately pulled his medallion off and set it on the cot. Amina looked at him with confusion.

"\[James? What's going on?\]" She asked. But he still wasn't fluent enough to understand. He got the message though.

He held up his finger, and then pulled the book up, searching for the words he'd found.

"\[I can read anything you want to write for me now.\]" He said with a large grin on his face.

It took a moment for her to understand what had just happened. Then she smiled wide and rummaged through one of her bags. When she was done, she had two quills, an inkpot, and two empty journals.

The two of them spent the night writing cheesy notes, dirty jokes, and cute stories to each other. Amina gave him pointers on how to write certain symbols more easily, and legibly. They laid on the bed like that until they both passed out exhausted.

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The next day passed without much note.

At one point they did see the outline of a dragon flying overhead. Artair showed James how to signal the dragon with a piece of metal, three flashes a pause, and five more flashes. He waited a few moments and then repeated it. After a few moments they saw the signal repeated back at them. It was a sign from one clan rider to the other when at a distance. It was simply a hale to let the other rider know you were there. If it wasn't returned, it meant that the dragon wasn't being ridden and could be trouble. If there was a signal, but it was frantic, it could mean that the rider was headed toward trouble. Artair informed James that if he saw that from the flying riders he should be wary, especially if heading the same direction. But the signal device would let him know if he was needed. After that they'd simply continued riding.

By the time they'd set up camp for the night, the capital was visible on the horizon.

While James and Amina had spent the night writing cute notes to each other, Veliry had spent that same night refining her written translation notes. As a result the next night she was passed out when her carriage's door opened.

It didn't help that Artair was the one on guard duty. He'd taken a quick break to utilize a tree, and so he didn't see or hear the diminutive, blonde haired, intruder slip out of their camp and into the nearby woods.

The ring had done its job beautifully. Veliry's near catatonic state had been a stroke of luck for him. But that was how a lot of things seemed to work for him.

Hence why he always smiled.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (65/?)

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Writer's note: Welcome to the end of the second story arc everyone. Hope y'all have enjoyed it so far. First arc was about James coming to terms with his situation, and gathering his (temporary) adventuring party. This one was, naturally, about their first adventure together. It was also about the vanishing blight, and James and Amina's budding romance. I know, some of you haven't agreed with that. But hey, I can't traumatize any of the characters if they aren't attached to anyone or anything. Right?

^(And yes. that is a warning about future events.)

The next arc is gonna see the political intrigue really take off. We're gonna see the different nations/organizations of the world come into play, not just Petravus. Hence the stalker. But we're also gonna see Earth making some moves too, so there'll be more Vickers focused chapters.

AND YES. There will be pancakes in the upcoming arc. They'll always be in seperate posts, with hyperlinks connecting them, so that you guys can partake or abstain at your leisure. They'll also be few and far between. James is a monogamy kinda guy, and this is his story. SO NO HAREMS. Even if the party sometimes loosely resembles one.

Anyways. That'll all be starting next week.

As always. Enjoy

\~

The next morning James, Amina, Kela, and Veliry woke early and went downstairs to have breakfast. To their surprise Artair was already there eating, and looked surprisingly put together for what he'd spent the previous night doing.

They ate their breakfasts, then they headed to the stable and carriage lot and gathered themselves for the trip south. They would be traveling for a week again.They would also pass by the forest where the Grabber Clan had ambushed them.

James had a feeling that that might cause some issues for Amina. But he knew that it would be important for it to happen, and intended to help her through it. Who knows? Maybe he would be the one that struggled with it. They'd find out once they got there.

Other than that though, each of them was looking forward to the trip south. Veliry was excited to present the research to the King and to

James's people. Kela was excited to see her family again. Artair was simply excited to get the trip over with.

James and Amina had slightly.... different reasons for being excited to return.

Once the group had gathered their gear, and mounted their beasts, they set out for the capital.

They didn't notice that they had a stowaway hiding inside one of the closets within Veliry's carriage.

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The stowaway in question twisted a ring on their finger and said a few ancient words from their youth. When they did, they felt themself grow incredibly sleepy. Felt their heart rate and breathing slow down immensely. Felt themselves drying out and shrinking. They hated that sensation. But it had allowed them to live far longer than most people. It also made them incredibly difficult to detect.

The ring would deactivate in five days. Just in time to slip out of their hiding spot before they actually reached the capital.

They smiled as they entered the forced slumber.

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Vickers watched, and listened, carefully as the trading clerk accepted several of the varying coins from the traveling merchant they were talking to. The merchant was selling bales of what appeared to be cotton to Vickers, though he had to admit he couldn't say for certain. The bales had an orange-ish tinge that made him think that he might be wrong.

He'd spent the past hour or so wandering the small market-like trading house. He'd meandered up and down the aisles inspecting different supplies and goods that were on display. He made sure to linger near the clerk's desk so that he could observe the conversations, and get an idea of what the different coins were worth. He noted that he occasionally saw paper bills, though not often, that seemed to be worth more than the coins. The small purse of coins that he'd taken from Taman had none of those, confirming what the carpenter had told him of his lifestyle. But he was certain that he still had enough money to afford a few things easily.

He was also happy to note that the linguists had done a good job of updating the Lexicon. As he looked around at the different signs, he knew that it would be a while before he had the written language figured out. But he should at least be able to hold a conversation.

After he'd seen enough to be certain, he grabbed a few supplies and approached the counter. They weren't much, just a traveller's map, a few books (he didn't know what about), and a package of dried meat. The clerk greeted him with a grin.

"Good afternoon sir. I see that you've finally found what you want?" The young man said. Vickers noted that they had pointed ears and had to wonder if they were an elf, and if so; whether they were actually "young".

He took just a split second to mentally reference what he'd learned. He was a low level Polyglot. He fluently knew seven different languages, soon it would be eight, but he still always needed a moment to process what he wanted to say.

"Good day." He replied as he placed the items on the counter. "I believe so. I was hoping that you might have some rope as well. But I didn't see any."

"Ah. Sorry about that." The 'young' elf answered. "We don't sell any. But the farmer's supply a few buildings over always has some." He pointed over his shoulder as he said this, then he began inspecting Vickers' choices.

"Ah, I see. I'll have to check there next." He said with a smile. He pulled the purse out of his jacket pocket. "How much?"

"Uhhh... looks like... five gold, a silver, and two brass." The clerk answered.

Vickers rummaged through the purse for a moment, then retrieved the coins needed and handed them to the clerk. He pulled an additional silver out and held it up where the clerk could see.

"I am sure you've noticed that I'm new here." He said to the clerk. The clerk nodded as he placed the coins in his drawer. "How far would you say the capital is from here? If you're walking that is?" He asked.

The clerk thought for a moment. Then picked up the map that was still on the counter. He unfolded it and pointed at a small drawing of a village. It was on the western side of the country and about two thirds of the way down.

"That's us here in Redleg." The elf said. Then he traced his finger along a long and occasionally winding road. It crossed several rivers, rounded a lake, and cut through a small mountain range. Eventually it ended on a large city with a castle dominating its illustration. Vickers had already guessed that that was the capital. "That's the capital." The elf said, looking at him. "I wouldn't suggest walking it. Not with winter being just on the other side of the rings. But if you took a horse it'd take you about....." They thought it out for a moment. "Four months... give or take. Faster if you can charter a clan rider or a transportation mage. Though we don't have any of those in town right now."

That wasn't what Vickers had wanted to hear. Still, he put on a smile and slid the silver coin across the counter. The clerk took it swiftly, then handed the goods to Vickers.

"Thank you." Vickers said.

"If you'd like." The clerk added, stopping Vickers mid turn. "The stable is right next to the farmer's supply." He said, gesturing over his shoulder again.

Vickers nodded. "Thank you. I'll go take a look." Then he walked outside, placing the goods into his backpack as he did.

As he left the store he checked the purse, regretting how light it had become from the single transaction. He hadn't expected the purchase to be so pricey. But then again he also hadn't seen anyone buying books or a map. Both of which he should have known might be expensive given this world's technological level.

Still, they were good to have. He would have had to get a map somehow sooner or later. Plus, the books would help the linguists back home figure out the written language. He headed to the Inn where he'd booked a room and went up to the room.

He laid the map out on the table in front of him. Then he pulled out the comm pad in his jacket pocket. It was a heavy duty version of a cell phone/tablet, and allowed him all the same abilities that either of those would. He placed a coin on the image marking the town he was in, Redleg as the elf had called it, then another coin on the capital. He snapped a few pictures, focusing first on the overall map, then the two different locations.

After that he began leafing through the books he'd gotten, he snapped pictures of their covers, and then began going through and imaging every page. They were short books, the longest only being about thirty pages, but it was still a boring task.

Lastly he pulled a small cord from inside the left side of his jacket. He plugged it into the bottom of the pad and uploaded the footage it had recorded. It gathered data from a series of cameras on the outside of the jacket, each disguised as buttons, and could either record video or pictures based on commands he gave it by pinching certain parts of the ends of the sleeves. His shirt had a similar setup, but went into rest mode any time he put his jacket on over it.

It took a few minutes, but when it was done uploading Vickers was happy to see the footage of his walk through the village, his perusal of the store, and his conversation with the clerk. It wasn't terribly interesting intel. But this was a whole new world, with a whole new set of people, languages, currencies, governments, and most importantly magic. It may not have been terribly exciting, but he knew that every bit of data would be incredibly useful to the nerds back home.

A few taps of his fingers and the data was sending to the signal booster back in the forest a few miles away. Then he pulled the battery pack from his jacket and plugged it into the charger alongside the pad. The charger was a small, but incredibly efficient, combination of a solar panel, crank charger, and a turbine that could use wind or water currents.. It

was no bigger than one of the books he'd just bought, and could be recharged with enough energy to last through several weeks of pad recharges.

It was also very fast. He heard the pad ding, not even a minute after having plugged it in. Then he saw the light on the battery pack turn from orange to green only a few seconds later. He plugged it back into his jacket, tucking it into one of the small hidden compartments. Then he went back out.

There were still a few hours of daylight left. He might as well check out the stable.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (64/?)

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Writer's note: No, I am not gonna elaborate on Sigbert's Horse AT ALL!

Also: MORE INTRIGUE!!!

Enjoy.

PS: Yes. James does get into a drake measuring contest lol.

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The trip back to Jadesport was relatively easy.

There'd been a bit of a hassle at the outset. Several of the soldiers set to accompany them had developed some stomach issues after having breakfast. Replacements had to be pulled from a different section of the camp forces and the guard rotations had to be adjusted as a result. General Sigbert had ordered that all the food stores be checked and that the cooks would be the ones responsible for the proper disposal of anything that had gone bad, and that he'd be punishing them further when he returned.

After that small hiccup had been sorted the band of travelers took off. There were ten soldiers running escort. Two per carriage, with the remaining four acting as rotating perimeter scouts on their horses. Veliry's carriage took up position in the front of the small caravan, and James and Artair brought up the rear. Their drakes acted as a sort of "motivating" factor for the horses ahead of them.

Sigbert rode on a massive Clydesdale horse, or at least James thought it was a Clydesdale (it had sharpened predatory teeth that scared him a little), in between the two drakes. His "horse", as James began to think

of it, seemed completely undisturbed by the two massive lizards. If anything Xhalya seemed to want to stay away from it. But the creature payed her no heed, simply trotting along with the massive General atop it.

James hadn't had much interaction with Sigbert at the camp. His longest conversation with the massive General had been when he'd told him that he couldn't do anything about the blight. So he had very little frame of reference for the man, other than that he was Amina and Artair's uncle on their mother's side.

Sigbert was boisterously loud, often guffawing at his own jokes or yelling out loud exclamations about anything and everything. James got the sense that he was likely the "Crazy Uncle" of the family. He also got the notion that two days would be about all he could handle of the General. Any more than that and he might have to stuff some cotton balls in his ears. He liked Sigbert, but the man was a bit much for James.

Still, Sigbert put both Amina and Artair in good moods. It was very clear that the two of them liked their uncle and relished their time with him. It was very often that he would feel Amina shaking with laughter on the saddle behind him. And while James didn't think he could stomach too much of the General's presence, he could definitely stand to hear Amina laugh more often. So, Sigbert was fine in his books.

Additionally; he had to admit that it was nice to see Artair laughing at something other than one of his own insults. To see the prince actually opening up to someone, and dropping the wannabe roguish adventurer persona that he wore almost constantly, was a nice change. James almost felt like he could like the guy a few times. Then the prince would see James watching the conversation and the mask would be put back on immediately.

Whatever. James thought. *My drake's bigger than yours, and I'm gonna be bangin' your sister soon enough.* He felt bad almost as soon as he'd thought the latter part. *C'mon James, Mom raised you better than to think like that.*

Still, the trip wasn't too bad.

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The second day, as they'd woken up, there'd been another bit of an issue with the guards. During the night one of the horses had gotten loose and galloped off into the distance. Several of the guards had mounted up to search for it, but nothing had been found save tracks. By the time they'd given up the search and come back it had almost been time for the camp to leave.

Sigbert wanted to be mad. But the guards that had been on watch at the time had reported that the horse had simple spooked suddenly and unexpectedly. It had snapped its restraint in order to escape. Bad luck, nothing more.

Sigbert simply requested that Veliry ride IN her carriage and that one of the guards take the carriage reins from Kela whenever she tired. Veliry agreed easily since the interior of her carriage was more comfortable anyways, plus it would give her a better chance to read some of the research notes.

Still, the fact that several of the horses, and their riders, hadn't gotten a good rest, slowed them down.

As a result, they didn't arrive at Jadesport until well after dark. Sigbert and the guards went to the barracks and stables to unload and report in for the night. James and Artair turned their drakes in as well, while Kela, Veliry, and Amina got them a room at the Inn they'd stayed in last time.

After setting Steve and Xhalya up, Artair and James parted ways. James headed to the Inn, and Artair headed off to drink. Though, he promised he'd meet up with them all for breakfast.

In all the commotion, nobody noticed that one of the guards had checked in at the barrack, and then promptly disappeared. His absence, and the false name he'd used, wouldn't be discovered for several days.

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James met up with the others at the Inn just in time for dinner to be brought to them in the dining room. The staff had had to reheat some of the day's leftover stew, but they'd been happy to do so when Amina had promised to pay enough for the cooks to get a round on them. James sat next to her and attempted to enjoy the stew. Kela assured him that it was a Jadesport specialty.

James was reminded of a red squid curry that his aunt had made once when he was a child.He did everything he could NOT to throw up. It was one of the first meals he'd had since coming here that he had not enjoyed. But it was still nice to eat with everyone.

Afterwords he and Amina retired to their room. James made a point of ignoring Kela's grin as they all parted ways. He would have worried about having to resist temptation under other circumstances. but both of them were dog tired after riding all day. He was also a little concerned that he might end up spending the night running back and forth to the latrine. So ultimately nothing ended up happening besides the two of them passing out together.

James was right though. He did end up making several runs to the head.

He just prayed that he wouldn't have the runs as they travelled back to the capital the next day.

Neither of them noticed that they were being watched from a building across the street. It would have been difficult for them to notice, as their observer was very adept at using the shadows. He sat, hanging from the wall of the next building over, just under the eaves, and watched

them through the night. He smiled when he saw James leave for the bathroom for the first time of the night.

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Sebastien Vickers emerged from the forest with a smile on his face.

It was a beautiful day here in this new world. It was a bit chilly, but that wasn't an issue. The team back home had sent him a crate with a large assortment of clothes, most of which had hidden compartments. And he was wearing a large leather coat that would have looked at home in the old west. The boots they'd sent him even reminded him of one of his old pairs of motorcycle boots.

He'd packed up the base camp, hanging most of the equipment high up in the trees hidden in some camouflage netting. The signal booster was also up in the trees, its aerials and dish extending just a bit past the canopy. He also had several drones on autopilot around the perimeter. They were solar powered and programmed to work in shifts as they recharged. They would warn him if anyone got too close to any of his gear.

Taman had been released. He'd dosed him with a heavy sedative that would also make his memory incredibly hazy. Unfortunately for Taman, Vickers had had to make it look like the poor guy had been beaten up pretty badly. He'd used some of the gear from the little fuzzy tribe creatures to hurt the innocent carpenter, had even lodged one of their arrows in Taman's shoulder a few inches, and then left his unconscious body at the edge of the woods near where his relative's farm was.

Taman would be okay though. Vickers wasn't trying to kill anyone for no reason after all. He'd just need to spend some time recuperating. If anyone asked him what had happened, he'd tell them a story about how he'd been knocked out unexpectedly while picking mushrooms. He might recount SOME of his time with Vickers. But the arrow in his shoulder, and the handful of dead "Reklings" as Taman had called them, would look like they'd been beaten to death by someone as strong as a carpenter could be.

But any searching party would only find the remnants of the Rekling camp. It would appear as though the tribe had cleared out. Vickers had worked hard to make it look that way. They'd assume that Taman had hallucinated while being held prisoner, or that he'd been poisoned (not too far off of the truth) and just chalk it up to the Reklings.

While all that was or wasn't happening, Vickers thought that he would check out the small town that Taman had come from. It wasn't very big, but it did have a trading post in it. He could blend in very easily as a traveler and test out his new vocabulary. If it wasn't up to task he could just play the part of a foreigner who was still learning the language. At the very least, he'd be telling the truth there.

He'd wait there a few days, see if Taman's recovery caused any commotion, watch the drone feed in case anyone did manage to get too close to his

stuff. And if everything went as planned, he would be free to move about soon enough.

He cinched his backpack up, a simple brown canvas number that suited the setting, checked the status of the comm pad tucked into his jacket, and then began to walk towards the village. He practiced a few of the words that Taman had taught him, especially the ones he'd had difficulty pronouncing.

He had a capital to head to, and a castle full of royalty to get his eyes on.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (63/?)

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Writer's note: Ever had to say no to a "Sure thing"? It can be rough as f&#$.

Stay strong James.

\~

After James finished loading the books into the carriage he decided to go take a shower. He was still a little sticky from his morning run. Plus the cold water of the bathing tent's shower reservoir would help cool him down..... in more ways than one.

Before that, since he was already in the same area, he went over to the tree where Steve had been tied up. The massive drake woke up before James ever got close, likely smelling him from where he'd been slumbering. James grabbed a couple of goat legs from the shed that held all the food for the various mounts. Steve happily licked his face repeatedly when he got there, likely enjoying the salt on James's skin. James fed him the goat legs and gave his neck some scritches, enjoying the deep rumbling in Steve's chest as he did.

After that he went to the bathing tent.

He was right. The cold water pouring down from the small opening felt amazing. He always loved a cold shower after a run, even if the run had been cut short. The fact that it helped him calm down in regards to Amina only helped. He needed to slow down and think things through before he got himself, or even Amina herself, in trouble. He spent roughly ten minutes in the shower, soaking up the cold water for as long as he could tolerate it. It was dreadfully cold, likely due to the incoming winter. Then he closed the small spigot and grabbed a few towels.

Crap. He thought, as he realized his mistake. *I should've grabbed clothes before I came over here.*

Since he didn't have much choice, he simply wrapped the larger towel around his waist, and draped the other one around his shoulders. Then he grabbed his bundle of clothes, slid his feet into his boots, and walked back to the tent.

It wasn't an unusual sight. He himself had seen several people walk back to their tents in towels. A few even did it without the towels. There was no rule in place governing this practice, and no one seemed to be bothered either way. James wasn't either.

He was more worried about what would happen once he got to the tent.

He and Amina had been on the verge of undressing when Veliry had interrupted. They'd even changed clothes together several times, though typically separated by the small wall in their tent that was made just for such a situation. But as of right now, neither of them had ever seen the other naked. His shower had managed to help him calm down, as all cold showers did. But he had to wonder if Amina had had a chance to cool down too.

James slapped the side of the tent. "Amina. I'm back. Coming in." He announced.

James entered the tent to see Amina fully dressed, her armor glistening over her black pants and red shirt. She was busy strapping on the last few pieces while grabbing the belt with her sword and dagger on it.

"What's the special occasion?" He asked as he pulled the towel from his shoulder and dried his hair a bit more.

Amina looked at him, eyes widening a bit as she saw his chest and stomach, she blushed and continued fastening her armor. "Oh, nothing. It just feels like it's been too long since I wore my full uniform. I was going to hit the training yard and see how this-" She gestured to the eye patch. "-affected my fighting ability. I need to know before we start traveling again."

James nodded as he pulled a pair of brown pants out of his pack. Then he began looking for a shirt.

"Makes sense. I can join you if you'd like. I kind of want to practice with that chain." He said as he pointed to the chain and short sword hanging from one of the tent poles. "Need to get better with that." He stood up with the clothes in hand and stepped over behind changing wall.

Here's the real test. He thought, as he pulled the towel from his waist and draped it over the wall.

There was a small oil lamp on the small table in front of him, and he knew from previous days that Amina could see his silhouette if she looked

this way. Sure enough, he heard her stop moving for a second. Then he heard her moving towards him.

James ignored it and continued dressing.

He was about to button the pants up when he felt her grab him, one hand on the side of his stomach and the other on the opposite side of his head. She turned his head towards her and kissed him deeply. James couldn't resist the urge to kiss back, placing his left hand on the hand holding his head. His other hand kept holding his pants up.

There was another part of James that couldn't avoid wanting to join in too. Especially as he felt her right hand wandering forward. James let go of the pants, letting them drop a bit, and stopped that hand. She broke the kiss.

"Is this okay?" She asked, concern on her face.

James breathed heavily and swallowed. *God why does this have to be so difficult?* He wondered.

"It is." He answered.

"Then why did you stop me?" She asked as she rested her head on his shoulder.

"I just-" How could he word this? "I just think we should go slow." He said. "We've been through a lot. And I don't want us to rush into this." As he said this he pulled his pants back up all the way, concealing his unavoidable excitement. He turned to her and pulled her in for a kiss with the other hand. She gripped his neck and waist again, facing him this time. "Can we talk about this first?" He asked as he rested his forehead against hers.

She nodded. But when he tried to step back she resisted for a moment. Part of him wanted her to.

"Is everything okay?" She asked as she turned, letting him continue dressing. James could hear the concern in the question.

"Yes." He said, now putting the blue shirt on over his medallion. "This isn't anything bad." He assured her. "But I think we need to think this through." He took her hand and led her to the bed. Then he sat down and pulled her down next to him. She adjusted her armor for a second and then sat, looking at him.

"Amina." He started. "Believe me when I say.... I want nothing more than to do that." He said. She was about to say something, but he held up his hand. "But we, you and I, are in a very strange situation." He looked toward the door for a moment, and then pulled the medallion out of his shirt, holding it up in front of her. "I'm a soldier from another world. You're a princess, and a warrior from this world. Plus all the other crazy things that have happened just since I got here." His head dropped.

"And you're not sure if this is a good idea?" She asked, following the thought to its logical conclusion.

"That's the toughest part." He said. "I think it's a great idea. Like I said, I want nothing more right now. I just...." He thought for a second. "I don't want it to have.... I don't know... unforeseen consequences?" He thought. "I don't know if that's the best way to say it. But I don't want us to get in trouble... or cause trouble... or end up getting you hurt somehow." He admitted, lowering his head as he did. "I mean, what kind of rules does your kingdom have about royalty being in relationships? Have I committed some kind of taboo or something? Is your dad gonna behead me?"

He tried to make the last sentence a joke, chuckling as he did. But Amina didn't laugh. he looked up and saw that she was very serious.

"Amina?" He asked.

She breathed deeply, clearly thinking about what she was going to say. After a few moments of thinking he'd said something wrong, and over-analyzing what he'd said. She finally spoke.

"I....." She started. "I joined the guard.... specifically to avoid those rules." She gripped his hand tightly, he squeezed it back. "When I was young. All anyone ever wanted to ask me was; who was I going to marry?" She looked away, trying to remember. "Was I going to marry prince so and so of the Estlands? Was I going to marry the Lord of Trade in Jadesport? Maybe I would marry one of the Arch-Druids to earn the rights of nature. Who will you marry? Who will you marry? Over and over." She said. "And all I ever wanted was to be free to travel the land. But I was a princess, and not the eldest child. So I was destined to marry someone to earn my father, or my oldest sibling, some power."

James sat and listened as Amina admitted what was clearly a painful memory.

"So, when I turned fifteen, I joined the guard. Kela helped me sneak out of the castle and over to one of the recruiting posts outside of the capital so I could sign up. By the time my father found out I was already wearing a trainee's uniform." She smiled. "He was so mad. He'd thought that Kela and I were going to Jadesport to go shopping. As I'm sure you can guess, she joined up alongside me."

"That sounds like a fun story." he said, smiling.

"It wasn't." She said, chuckling. "We had to walk all night in the rain, and hide in the day time to avoid being caught and brought back. I was incredibly sick when I signed up." She laughed a little at the memory. "But father couldn't undo my oath. If he had he would've lost a lot of his standing with the military. Hells, Uncle Sigbert probably would have thrown him from the ramparts. The Soldier's Oath is highly respected throughout the land."

James thought of the Oath he'd sworn when he'd joined the Army, and the Soldier's Creed that he could recite by memory. How nice it was to find that his girlfriend had something similar, and felt so strongly about it.

"I joined the Army to AVOID being married off as a bargaining chip. My sister became a mage so that SHE could avoid being married off against her will. Artair became a drake rider specifically so he could escape the responsibilities of being a prince." She laughed. "That idiot almost got himself killed just so he could avoid going on more diplomacy missions."

"Hmmm. Maybe he and I can find some common ground." James joked. Amina smiled and buried her face in his arm.

"I love my father James. Don't misunderstand that. And I love my country and my army too." He nodded, he could understand that. "But I want to be able to make my own decisions okay?"

"Okay." he agreed. "But if it's okay with you. I think I'd still like it if we took our feet off the pedal." She pulled up, confusion on her face. "Just for a little bit." He assured her. "We've been through a hell of a few weeks. I think a bit of calm would be good for us."

She thought about it for a few moments. "Okay. I think I can agree to that." She said at last.

"Besides." He added. "As lovely as your uncle's camp is. I think I'd like our first time to be somewhere a little more.... refined." He said with a grin. "You know, wine and dine you? All that stuff."

"Wine and dine me?" She asked. "I'm not a lamb James. You don't need to fatten me up and marinade me."

He laughed. "No. It's an expr-"

"I know what it is. We have that expression too." She cut him off.

He gasped, mockingly. "Making fun of my status as an outworlder already?" He joked in the same posh english accent from the night before. She began laughing. Before she could roll too far back he pulled her in and kissed her again, quickly this time. "Seriously." he said. "We'll make a whole... thing... out of it. You'll get to see me being all *romantic*." He said this last word in a husky deep voice and made a kissy face while crossing his eyes. She started laughing again.

He thought he might just love that laugh.

The two of them finished getting ready, today they'd pack their gear as the researchers finished with the last few books. James would hopefully be able to finish his translation book. Then, next morning, they would take off to return to the capital.

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Later that night. As people were beginning to turn in and go to bed. Specifically during the changing of a guard shift. One of the guards went to relieve themselves a few yards from their post.

The new shift had just shown up. So the guard was finally free for the night. He walked over, past the red streamer that marked the danger area, and undid his belt and buttons. He was on the verge of beginning to urinate, aiming for a patch of the blight like he always did on night shifts, when something impacted the back of his head.

He was out before he knew what had even happened.

A pair of hands caught him before he could fall forward into the blight. Then they dragged him into a nearby bush.

Several minutes later, a mostly naked guard could be seen being pushed into the patch of blight completely, disappearing in seconds. Or at least, this would have been seen, if the guard post nearby weren't facing the other way, preventing people from going INTO the danger area.

A few minutes later, several hundred yards away, a guard emerged from the danger area. They did so in one of the few blind spots in the guard rotation. The guard quickly made their way to the tent that had just become vacant, and headed inside.

Blonde hair spilled out as they removed their helmet. They smiled as they drifted off to sleep. They had a long day ahead tomorrow, traveling to Jadesport.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (62/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/s0unil/wait_is_this_just_gate_61/) /
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Writer's note: RELATIONSHIP STUFF!!!! (no pancakes yet)

\~

James woke before Amina.

He hadn't gotten to sleep until nearly one in the morning. Then, only four and a half hours later, he woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. So, he did what he'd done the last time he'd been too restless to get a good night's sleep.

He went for a run.

He decided to see how far he could run around the restricted area. He put his green tee, uniform pants, and his combat boots on. He chastised

himself for having what might as well be called a beard at this point. He needed a shave. But he could do that later.

Before he left, he used the glasses and book to write a crude note. Using the glasses to write in the native alphabet he wrote:

Be back. Just clearing my head. Sleep in.

He took one more glance at her, then exited the tent.

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The restricted area was marked by staked poles with red streamers hanging from them. Where the area entered woods, they had simply opted to tie the streamers to the trees.

James was awestruck, though not surprised, when he saw several trees that had been interrupted by the patches of blight. He also wasn't surprised to see that the guards had already started to adjust the outline of the rest based on where the sky blights were.

It was as he was noticing this, that he realized he'd chosen the wrong place to run. He'd wanted to clear his head, and all he'd managed was to remind himself of what was causing him so much frustration in the first place.

So, he just kept running.

He kept running, until he accidentally hit a blight.

He hadn't seen it. Of course he hadn't. They were, by their nature, hard to see. And it was still kind of dark. How would he have seen it?

Luckily for him, he hadn't run into it face first. But he did step directly into it with his right foot. The disruption in his footing caused him to land slam face first into the ground. The first warning had been the sudden sensation of nothingness encompassing his leg all the way to his knee.

James began to panic as he realized what had happened. He looked down to his leg and saw that it was well into the blight. In fact, his foot SHOULD have been wedged under the dirt on the other side. But it wasn't. Who knew what would happen if he lifted straight up?

James carefully pulled himself along the ground, go figure he had to do it Army crawl style, until he got past the point where his foot would be unimpeded if he lifted his leg out of the patch of blank space. He did so as quickly as he could. Then he scrambled to his feet.

"Fuckin' goddamit!" He yelled at the blight as he stood up. "WHY ARE YOU HERE? WHY ARE YOU **MY** GODDAM PROBLEM? **AAAAAGH**!" He yelled as he stomped off. Mostly out of anger at his own stupidity. But also because he'd just been scared shitless.

He put his hands on his knees, breathing deeply as he tried to bring his heart-rate back down. He was sweating, and not from the run. He sat down on the ground, facing the offending anomaly. He raised his arms up and clamped them over his head. Then he kept breathing. He stayed that way for several minutes until he finally got himself relaxed again.

When he was finally calm again, he stood back up, looked at the lights of the camp. He'd only gotten about two miles away or so. Then he walked over to a nearby warning pole, pulled it from the ground, and placed it near the patch that had ruined his run.

"I fuckin' hate you." He said to the patch of nothing. Then he turned and began jogging back toward the camp. He went slower this time, and focused on his path.

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By the time he returned, Amina was already up. She'd gone to the mess tent and grabbed a few plates and some tea for them and was busy combing her hair. She turned to face him when he walked into the tent.

"Good morning." She said. "Everything okay?" She held the note up. "Your writing's getting better. Bit sloppy though."

He smiled. "Thanks." He said. "And.... sure. I went for a run. But uh. It didn't really make me feel better. Accidentally stepped in some blight."

"You ran through the blight fields?" She asked in shock.

"I didn't mean to. I was outside the markers. Guess they just missed a patch when they were setting them. Scared the shit out of me more than anything." He admitted.

"James you must be more careful." She admonished him. "What if you'd been hurt? Or what if you'd ended up... well, like Brikker?"

He sighed. She was right. "I know." He said. "I'm sorry. Don't worry. I'm not goin' running around here again."

"I was worried when I woke up and you weren't here." She admitted. "At least until I saw your note."

He winced. He'd known that that was a risk. "Sorry." He said quietly.

"It's okay." She said. "Sooner or later I'll have to learn to move around on my own again."

"Why?" He asked. "Am I not a good enough seeing eye dog?" He joked.

"A what?"

"A seeing eye-" He stopped when he saw the puzzled look on her face. "You know what, never mind. Earth thing."

"Oh." She replied, still confused. "Well, it's not that. Whatever that is. It's just...." she trailed off as she thought of how to word it. "It's just.... I'm a princess. And I'm a general. And I'm a Knight. I can't-"

James cut her off. "You can't live your life depending on someone else in order to be what you need to be?" He asked. "You can't keep being scared?"

She thought about that for a moment.

"Yes." She agreed at last. "Yes. I suppose that that's the most accurate way to put it."

He shrugged. "Good. That's a good thing to be able to admit."

"I still want.... this." She said while gesturing at the tent, and all their stuff. "I still want.... us. I think."

James gulped. This was a bigger conversation than he'd expected. And it was sooner than he'd expected. Plus, it was happening right after he'd damn near had a heart attack.

"Me too." He agreed. He sat on the bed and patted the space next to him. She took the hint and sat down next to him. "I like... this." He said as he grabbed her hand, interlocking their fingers as he did.

"Me too." She agreed.

They rested their heads against each other and stayed that way for several long moments.

"By the way." He began, breaking the silence. "What do they call a couple in this world?"

What an odd question, she thought. "They just call them a couple." She answered.

"Hmmm. In my world they call them, boyfriend and girlfriend. At least until they're engaged or married." He said.

"Boyfriend and girlfriend?"

"I don't understand it either." He admitted.

"It does have a nice sound though." She admitted.

"Well, I guess that's what we are now." He replied. Then he turned to her. "There's just one thing we have to do to make it official." He said.

"What's that?" She asked.

He placed his hand on the back of her head and pulled her in for a kiss.

She kissed him back.

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They kissed like that for several minutes. James had been on the verge of taking his shirt off when they'd heard someone walking towards the tent. A bit of clattering, as they dropped something, followed by a light curse, confirmed that it was Veliry. So they broke off the action and straightened themselves up. Amina raced to redo the buttons on her shirt, finishing just in time for Veliry to tap on the side of the tent.

"James? Amina?" She asked.

James coughed. "Yeah, Vel. What's up?" He asked, blushing as Amina stifled a chuckle.

"May I come in?"

James looked at Amina, who made a shooing gesture and pointed at the chair he'd been sitting on the night before. He quickly, and quietly, stepped over and sat in it, picking the translation book up in the process.

"Please do." Amina responded, just as James was sitting down.

The flap opened, and Veliry's head popped in. Once she saw that they were both decent she stepped in fully. In her arms she held bundles of books and scrolls, and behind her floated two backpacks that looked to be loaded with the same. She quickly shuffled over and placed the pile she was carrying onto the nightstand, then began tidying it up. She gasped, and cursed under her breath. Then she straightened up and turned to them.

"We're almost done." She said finally. "The last few books are being copied as we speak. But they'll be done before dinner tonight." She looked at James, and almost immediately blushed and looked away. "Umm. Was I... Interrupting?" She asked awkwardly.

Amina just looked at the ground, trying to hold in a laugh, when James looked at her. Veliry looked at him and then pointed at her mouth. James held up his phone and looked at his reflection on the dark screen.

He had dark red lipstick all over his mouth. He wiped it with the back of his hand, and sure enough, some of it showed up. He looked at Amina.

"Oh, come on!" He exclaimed. "What was the point of making me rush over here if you knew I had your lipstick all over my face?" He asked. Even as ridiculous as it was, he couldn't stop the smile from creeping up on his face as he wiped the makeup off with a nearby towel.

"I can come back." Veliry said awkwardly.

"No. It's fine Vel." Amina replied. "Does this mean we can leave tomorrow?"

"Yes." Veliry answered. "General Sigbert would like to accompany us to Jadesport. I guess he has some business there. But, we should be able to leave at dawn." She sighed as she began gathering the pile of books up again. "I'll go put these in the carriage." She said.

James finished wiping his face, checking it one more time with his phone. "I'll help." He said as he stood up and made his way to the nightstand.

"No no." Veliry replied. "You two... um... resume. Whatever you were doing."

"It's fine Vel." James countered. "I'm not gonna let you carry all that by yourself." He said as he lifted most of the books up. "Come on."

As he exited the tent behind her he looked back at Amina and mouthed, *You'll pay for that,* to her. She just laughed and waved.

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Veliry broke the awkward silence first as they walked towards the carriage on the other side of camp.

"So. You and the princess are um.... a thing?" She asked.

"Uhhh. Yeah." James replied. "Yeah, we JUST kinda formally decided that, like, today."

"That's good." She said. "Congratulations."

"Thanks."

"Sorry about interrupting." She said meekly.

"It's fine. Really. Probably need to slow down anyways. Before I do anything stupid." he said.

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"Oh, you know?" He began. "I'm a soldier from another world. She's a princess. There's holes in existence. We almost died. Plus. I'm like... super stressed." He said as he stopped walking for a few seconds. He didn't like admitting any of that. But it was still true.

"You shouldn't let that hold you back." Veliry said. "I think you two would be good for each other. Besides, I think she's probably stressed too. And probably for a lot of the same reasons."

James hadn't thought of that. He decided to change the subject.

"So, you and that little researcher girl." He said, smirking. "You two snuck off awfully early the other night. You have a good time?"

Veliry blushed. "James!" She exclaimed.

"Relax." He replied. "I'm just teasing. You two looked cute together. What's her name anyways?"

"Thanks." Veliry whispered. "And it's Lena."

"Well, you and Lena looked cute together." He said.

Veliry blushed, but smiled. "Thanks." She said again.

The two of them continued walking to the carriage. Both of them were smiling for very similar reasons.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (61/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rymy11/wait_is_this_just_gate_60/) /
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James told General Sigbert about his thoughts on the vanishing blight. Namely, about his inability to do anything about it.

Understandably the general wasn't very happy about it.

He explained that he wasn't a scientist, or mage (at least not yet), and wasn't even intelligent about these kinds of things. He was a nursing student and a mechanic. This was out of his wheelhouse.

Kela confirmed this. She recounted the interview she'd done with James when he'd first arrived. She, Amina, and Veliry had told him about the conversation that the Colonel had had with King Farrick.

Sigbert was still disappointed, but he understood.

He agreed to give them copies of all the research on the blight. He'd been meaning to send an update to the king anyways, so it was killing two birds with one stone. However, it would take a few days to make a copy for James and Veliry's translation purposes.

In that time, James had to complete the book and use the resulting runes with Veliry. He'd also run a few more tests on the blight. He had come up with a few more ideas, and he might as well try them. Veliry rushed off to get a list of all the tests that had been done, to see if they matched up with what James was planning. Then she was going to get to work on copying notes. All the other researchers were being re-tasked, temporarily, to help her.

When they finally had finished planning, the sun was in the middle of the sky, just past the orbiting rings. Gixelle and Artair had also shown up. After recovering from the party, the two of them had spent the day prepping Gixelle and Maxel for their trip north.

Artair was officially taking over as James's riding instructor, and Gixelle had come to say goodbye.

Maxel and Steve were being oddly clingy with each other. Both of them seemed to realize that they wouldn't be together soon enough. Maxel was no longer being the ice queen she'd been when James had first met her. Instead, she and Steve were leaning against each other and rubbing their heads together, tails entwined.

When did that change? He wondered. *Am I gonna have to pay Drake Child Support?*

Gixelle shook hands with Sigbert, clasping forearms in that classic medieval warrior way that so many movies had shown James on earth. Sigbert lightly tapped the black eye with his knuckles.

"You can pay me back for that next time you come through." He said, and they both laughed.

Then Gixelle repeated the handshake with Kela. "You were great to watch in a fight." She told the, now mostly human, Captain.

"Compared to you and Maxel I might as well have been a new squire." Kela replied. "Good luck on the trip." Then the two of them embraced.

When Gixelle got to James and Amina. James began to reach his hand out. But before he could Gixelle had leaned forward and wrapped both him and the princess up in a hug.

"I'm so glad we got both of you back." She said, as James returned the hug. "We were all so worried."

James ignored the fact that he was having his breath squeezed out of him.

"Thanks for coming to get us." Amina said, taking the words right out of James's mouth.

"Yeah." He added. "Saved our asses."

Gixelle let go and held them at arm's length.

"No." She replied. Then she slapped James's shoulder. "Based on what I saw, if we hadn't shown up. You would've just killed 'em all yourself. We just lightened the load a bit." Then she turned to Amina. "He would've you know? For you."

Amina blushed but didn't say anything.

"You two take care of each other." She said, hugging them again to keep them from saying anything.

Before anyone could say anything else, she'd mounted up and was already riding. As she passed the edge of camp she turned back in her saddle.

"Remember what I said Arty!" She yelled. "No more drake shit! Next time, you answer to me!" Then she turned back and continued riding.

James looked at Artair just in time to see the prince cringe at the thought.

Can't blame him. James thought. *I wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of her wrath either.*

By the time he turned back, Maxel had already carried her to the next hill, and almost out of sight.

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Later, after using his phone to type up the tests that Veliry had listed off, James sat at the bubble of nothingness that was the vanishing blight. He sat cross-legged in front of it. His arms rested on his knees, with his hands laced in front of his face.

"What the fuck are you?" He asked the smudgy blob. Naturally, it just sat there, completely oblivious of his question.

They'd tried everything. The only thing he'd added to their knowledge was the fact that the blight wasn't radioactive. Oh, and the visual footage, useless as it was. That would have been incredibly useful information on his world. But they didn't even know what radiation was. He sure as hell wasn't the person to explain it to them, he didn't even completely understand it.

So he was sitting here, just looking at the blight. Forcing himself to look directly at it, to not look away the way his entire mind wanted to. Even when he did inevitably look away, it was impossible not to, he would then focus on the handful of other patches nearby.

It was as he was looking at these that he noticed something else. He looked up. Nobody had mentioned what he saw.

"Uhhhh. Hey Vel?!" He called back over his shoulder.

Veliry, who'd been working with two researchers to copy some information, multiple quills hovering near her hands, paused for a moment. The quills kept writing despite her distraction.

"Yeah?" She called.

James stood and pointed upward. "Has anyone written anything about all of those?" He asked.

At that, the researchers paused, writing stopping as they all looked at James. Then they looked at what he was pointing at. It took a few moments before their eyes were capable of comprehending what they were looking at. Eyes widened. One of the researchers was heard cursing under their breath.

In the sky, as randomly placed and sized as the ones on the ground, were other blobs of the blight. They were difficult to see. The fact that they were patches of nothingness, and that the eye and brain both seemed to rebel against them, made them difficult to see.

"Hey. You guys have made this a no-fly zone right?" He asked as he walked back toward the tent.

"A what?" Veliry asked.

"A no-fly zone." He answered. "You know, no griffins, no dragons or wyverns or anything, no... winged people." He gestured at the sky blights. "We don't want anyone flying into any of those." He added.

One of the researchers piped up. "The area has been off limits to civilians since it was discovered. The General actually already said no riding through the area. Don't know if he addressed flight or not. I'll go let him know about this." With that, the researcher departed the tent.

"I haven't seen anything in the notes about this." Veliry added. "Gods, they're hard to see, aren't they?"

"Yeah." James replied. "I think I only saw them out of spite for the one in front of me."

She leafed through some of the notes in front of her. "Hmm. One of the tests was to dig around one of the blights, see if it would fall down if it was unsupported. Looks like they don't. And yet, nobody thought about them being in the air too." She pondered this.

"It does change some things." That also negated his need to test that theory too. He'd planned on digging below one to see what happened.

Instead he pulled his phone out and snapped some pictures, and filmed a bit of footage of the sky blights. He even threw a rock at one of them while filming. The rock entered, but didn't fall back out the other side. Another test idea nullified.

"Uuuugh." He moaned. "Fuck." Things just kept getting better and better.

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That night James sat next to the wood stove in his and Amina's tent. He had the translation book in front of him, and was copying a section about an ancient knight named Sir Goodberry, who'd manage to negotiate a truce with an escaped demon of famine who'd been conquering the land.

Amina came in with pints of ale and bread and set them on the nightstand. She sat on the bed and watched him. The two of them sat in awkward silence like that for a few moments as he continued writing. Then she spoke.

"Are you okay?" She asked.

He lowered the glasses and set his pen down. He thought for long seconds. Finally he spoke, scratching his head as he did.

"I don't know." He admitted. "It's..... It's a lot." He accepted one of the mugs when she held it out to him. He took a long swig, savoring the bitterness of the dark beer. He put his hand over his face, rubbing his eyes.

He was so tired.

"What are you reading about?" She asked, interrupting his self pity party.

He looked back at the book, at the words he'd copied.

"The tale of Sir Goodberry, and his defeat of the demon lord Nazul." He said, doing what he could to sound dramatic.

"Oooh!" She exclaimed, lying on her stomach and propping her head up on her hands. "I love that story."

"Yeah?" He asked. "Want me to read you a bedtime story?" She nodded her head enthusiastically.

James climbed into the bed next to her, lying on his back and holding the book above him with his left hand. He propped the glasses up on his eyes, using the holding arm as a kickstand against his forehead. With his right hand he gestured for her to roll onto her side. She did, hugging his arm as he began to read.

"Long ago, in the kingdom of Esferia." He began, putting on a mockingly posh English accent. "There was a knight by the name of Daggolan Goodberry."

He read to her until she began to snore lightly, then he grabbed a pillow and gently put it under her head. As he did he removed the eye patch and tossed it onto the night stand. Then he wrapped his arm around her and tried to go to sleep too. She snuggled in tight to him.

He wondered when this had changed too. Likely right around when he'd woken up next to her in that stone hut, and seen how badly she'd been hurt. Was THIS a good idea?

He didn't care. He simply rested his head on the pillow next to hers.

Just one more question to throw onto the pile of questions that kept him up for another few hours.

He was so tired.

\----------

"What's the word from Vickers?" asked Colonel Muhammed.

"All reports good Ma'am." Replied one of the technicians. "One of the cases got clipped by the shutting of the door. But damage was minimal. Chief Vickers reported nausea and vertigo. But, so far, nothing else of note."

"Good. How is his CURRENT situation?" She asked.

"He has a base camp set up deep in a forest. Signal booster is functioning properly, and survey drones have mapped the area around him, and are tracking several creatures that he's deemed as potential threats." The tech consulted their notes. "Apparently there were some natives, of a tribal nature. He described them as 'Ewoks on meth'. They intercepted him as soon as he arrived, and were violent with him. But not enough of a match." The tech replied. "Also he's taken a human captive and is currently working on fine-tuning our translation lexicon."

"He took a captive?" She asked. It wasn't something he'd been ordered to do. But he had been given Carte Blanche to do as he saw fit to succeed in his mission. Plus it wasn't like they could stop him.

"Yes Ma'am. A carpenter." The tech read the notes on the computer in front of her. "Apparently after observing a nearby family he realized that our translations were.... less than optimal. He determined that improving upon it would be best. He's working with the linguists, and learning from the captive."

"Hmm. Fair enough. Anything usable so far?"

The tech checked the notes again. "Nothing that wasn't already revealed during the conversation with the king. But Vickers said that wasn't surprising. Taman, that's the carpenter, is just a tradesman. Not even a well known or well traveled one."

"Understood. Has he requested anything?"

"He's taken some pictures of local clothing, and he's requested some be sent through that are tailored to his size. Other than that.... just normal creature comforts. Nothing he deems mission critical though."

"That's fine. We already knew clothes would be an issue. As for the other stuff, we'll get it if it's feasible."

"I'll let him know Ma'am." The tech replied.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (60/?)

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Writer's note: 60 chapters WOOT WOOT!!!

And I'm still having fun. that's called IRL character growth. Look at me go.

Enjoy everyone. See y'all after the weekend.

\~

It felt..... well, that's the thing really. It didn't feel like..... anything.

The second James's arm reached into the blight it felt like nothing. It looked like nothing, as if it had turned invisible. Or rather, it had turned into whatever the blight was. He only reached in just past the wrist. But the second he did, all sensation beyond that point was gone. He pulled his hand back out, and it was a hand again.

James set the phone down, using the kickstand on its case to aim the camera at the blight, and undid the strap around his other wrist. Then he reached both hands into the blight. Again, he felt the feeling of nothingness. He tried touching his hands together, but when he did they passed right through each other, and he still felt nothing.

He craned his neck, moving his head dangerously close to the blight, and tried to look at where his arms ended in the blight. But all he could see was the nothingness. He reached back and grabbed the camera, then stretched his arm out around the side of the blight to see if he could get footage of his arm. He thought he got a good angle on it.

James pulled his hand out and stepped back. He checked the footage, but one again he got that weird visual glitch on the footage. Once his hands went in, they became a part of the glitch. The angle from the other side just showed the same.

James was uncomfortable. He stood up and slowly edged away from the patch of.... nothingness. This weird smudge of nonexistence.

He went to the nearby tent and grabbed a couple of wooden poles. He also pulled his gas mask bag out of one of his saddle bags, after a moment he managed find one of the radiation detection cards and pulled it out. He also grabbed the selfie stick from his assault bag. He wasn't proud of owning that, but his little brother loved getting selfies from his army life.

Then he walked back to the blight. Amina and Kela watched him eagerly. Veliry had shown up and was sitting on a chair covering her eyes and drinking tea.

James approached the spot and set the phone up to watch and record again. It was only about three feet wide at its widest point. But James laid one of the poles down across the narrowest point, where it was maybe a foot

and a half across. The two ends of the pole protruded from the blight, sticking about a foot or so out on each side. Just as James suspected, the pole didn't fall into the blight, and when he moved one end, the other end matched it. He took the remaining pole and poked it into the blight, stuck it in as deep as he could without submerging his hand again. Then he pulled it across the other pole.

The pole on the ground didn't move. More importantly, James didn't feel the pole in his hand meet any resistance. The two poles passed through each other as easily as if there was nothing in their way. That was impossible. There was no way the poles weren't touching each other. They had to have collided. But in the blight, that didn't seem to be the case. James dropped the pole in his hand and watched as it dropped into the blight. It fell as though he'd dropped it into a well.

James went back to the phone and put it into the selfie stick. Then he used some string to tie both of them to his wrist. He walked back to the blight, looked at the camera and spoke.

"Hope you come back phone. Kinda need you." He said.

Then he extended the selfie stick as far as it would go and plunged the camera into the blight. He held it for a few seconds, then spun it around, waved it from side to side, and pulled it back out.

"Oh, thank god." He said, upon seeing the camera still attached. Even better, when he turned it around, he saw that it was still on and functioning.

Finally, before retreating again, he pulled the little orange card out and held it next to the blight. No change. He tied some string through the hole in it, then dipped it into the blight, almost like dipping a tea bag. When he withdrew it, he once again saw no change. No radiation present.

What the fuck was this thing?

\----------

James watched the footage with the others. A few of the researchers from the camp joined them, marveling at the phone before James could get it playing.

When it started rolling again he saw his face up close.

"Hope you come back phone. Kinda need you." He heard himself say. As always the sound of his own voice weirded him out. But that wasn't important right now.

The image shifted as the phone moved with the stick. Then it plunged into the blight. The screen glitched, pin holed down to a single pixel, then exploded and pixelated into a mixture of colors that the software on the device couldn't really render appropriately. It pin holed back to a single pixel again. Then, suddenly, the view showed James's face, looking

relieved. The amount of time that had elapsed did not match up with how long James remembered having it in there.

"Oh, thank god." recorded James said.

James scrolled the footage back to the blight section of footage and paused it. Then he began moving it frame by frame.

After a few seconds he gave up. He hit the screen lock button and placed the phone face down on the table. His head dropped down to the table and he laced his fingers over the back of it. He sighed deeply.

"What is it James?" Amina asked, placing a hand on his back. "Did you see something?"

James raised his head, staring at the wall of the tent.

"No." He admitted. "That's the problem. That footage is about as useful as a spoiler on an Abrams."

"That's.... bad?" She asked.

"Yeah." He said as his head sank back down.

"Did you figure anything out at least?" Veliry asked from her seat in the darkest corner of the tent.

James thought for a second. Had he?

"Well." He said at last. "It's doing something fucky with the matter that you put into it. I mean, my hands passed right through each other. So did the two poles. Even though the pole on the ground was clearly still a whole, singular, object."

"Yes." One of the researchers spoke up. "We've done that test before. Poles, ropes, metal sheets. It all reacts the same way. As soon as it enters the blight, anything can pass through it as though it is made of air."

James thought about that. What was happening in there? If only he could see what was going on in there.

After a few moments thinking he asked about something that had made him curious since they'd given him the ground rules.

"You have a rule about not sticking your head in there?" He asked.

"Yes." The researcher answered.

"Is that because you're worried about what would happen? Or because someone already did it and it went poorly?'" He knew that most rules were made after they became necesary.

"Ummm. Both?" Said the researcher.

James turned and looked at the researcher, a young elf woman with black hair.

"What happened to the person who stuck their head in there?" He asked.

She looked down at the ground. "He.... He didn't survive. The second his head entered the blight, his body went limp. When we pulled him back out he was... alive. But not really." She answered.

"What do you mean?" Kela asked this time.

"Well. He's in the healer's tent still. If you'd like to see for yourself." She replied. "His brother is on his way from Vinfard as we speak, but it will still be another week or so before he arrives."

\------------------------------

His name had been Brikker Bold-Shoulder. He'd been a dwarf mage before he'd stuck his head into the vanishing blight. Veliry knew him. She told them that he had been one of the best earth mages she'd ever known.

Now as the four of them stood near him in the healer's tent, James understood what the researcher had meant.

He was brain-dead.

James had volunteered at a few hospitals and nursing homes in his time as a nursing student. Doing so had earned him extra credit, and credit hours towards some of his certifications and classes. Plus he'd gotten a few awards from his unit as well, they were mostly just worth promotion points.

As a result, he recognized the look of someone who was no longer truly alive.

Brikker lay in the bed before them, drool oozing down his chin, eyes open but unseeing. He had some of the glowing green bandages wrapped around his head. James knew that they were just a last-ditch effort to bring him back. He doubted they would work.

Veliry held Brikker's hand in both of hers. She looked like she was going to cry.

James motioned for Kela and Amina to follow him out. They followed and let Veliry say goodbye to her colleague.

When they got outside and had walked a few yards away James turned to the others.

"Guys." He began. "I don't like being the bearer of bad news. But this," he gestured at the tent, and in the direction of the blight. "This is not something I know how to handle. I don't think I can do anything about this." He admitted.

"Then what can you do?" Kela asked.

"Right now? Not much honestly." He put his hand on his chin and thought for a second. "I need all the notes that your uncle is allowed to give me." He said to Amina. "Then I'm gonna have to finish the homework Veliry gave me." He thought a second longer. "Guys I think we have to head back to the castle as fast as we can. The only thing that I can think of is getting these pictures and the footage back to my people. Maybe between that and the researcher's notes, they might be able to figure something out." He looked at Amina, his eyes filled with worry. "But I don't... I don't think I'm the guy for this." He admitted.

Amina just nodded. "Then we have a plan. For now, at least." She said.

Kela nodded in agreement and, once Veliry had emerged from the tent, the began walking towards the General's tent.

Their time at the research camp was going to end almost as soon as it had begun.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (59/?)

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Writer's note: No pancakes served after breakfast hours have concluded. Try a different chapter. Later on. Once some have been cooked. For now, just relationship growth.

OH YEAH! You're finally getting your first bit of solid info on the VANISHING BLIGHT.

Enjoy.

\~

When James awoke the next day, he remembered the night before. He'd convinced General Sigbert to let him go easy on the drinking. He explained that the last few times he'd drank, he'd nearly ended up getting killed in various ways. He neglected to mention that oner of those times had almost been by Amina.

The welcome party had been raucous. All the soldiers and researchers not on guard duty had joined. Several of them had even thrown together a rag tag band and played music. Apparently Veliry and one of the mages in the camp had a bit of "history" and ended up leaving the party early together. James had just smiled as he watched them sneak out.

Gixelle and the General had very quickly begun to challenge each other to physical challenges. It had started at arm wrestling. Then it had quickly progressed to cask lifts, then cask tosses. Eventually it ended in a drinking contest that somehow involved cutting down trees. James didn't understand that, but they weren't roping him into it, so he wasn't going to worry about it.

Kela meanwhile, ran into an old werewolf friend who she introduced to James as the resident Arch Druid. Unlike Kela he didn't seem to be undergoing the change back to human, and actually looked much more wolf-like than Kela ever had. James almost expected him to walk on all fours. But he seemed nice. He even had a fox that sat on his shoulders throughout the night. James tried petting it, but the fox snapped at him. Kela and Bark-Soul, as he was now called apparently, spent the night leading the soldiers in drinking songs. Though, these usually devolved to howling up into the sky for the two of them.

James and Amina simply continued enjoying each other's company. Sharing drinks by the fire. Eating the roast meat and bread that was being passed around liberally.

When the party was finally winding down, James staggered over to where Gixelle and Sigbert were playing a card game that James recognized as Sheathed Dagger. They had several other soldiers playing with them. James was half tempted to join them. But Amina was staggering, and he wasn't far behind.

When he asked Sigbert where their tents were the General had been on the verge of standing up when Gixelle had pulled him back down into his seat and began whispering into his ear. Sigbert's eyes widened. Then he nodded and clapped Gixelle on the shoulder.

"Follow me." He said, as he stood up and began walking towards the tents that had been set up for them.

After a few minutes of walking the General showed them to a tent. Amina was now basically walking asleep, her head lolling to the sides randomly as the walked. Sigbert pulled the tent flap aside and ushered them in. James gently placed Amina on the bed, lying on her side in case she got sick, and put a blanket over her.

"Okay. She's set." He said as he turned around towards Sigbert. "Now, where's my tent?" He asked. But when he looked, Sigbert was already gone. "Hey? General?" Nobody answered.

"James?" Amina asked behind him. He felt her hand grab his.

"Yeah?" He asked, turning back to look at her.

"Stay. Please."

So he did.

\----------

The next morning, they woke up next to each other. But for the first time, it was intentional.

They didn't talk about it. They didn't need to. All they'd done was sleep together. Nothing new there. They put their jackets and boots back on and headed out to get washed up and changed into cleaner clothes.

Gixelle was passed out, leaning against Maxel. She had a black eye.

Sigbert was dead on his feet. Or, more accurately, his chair. He was sitting up straight, a mug of ale still clenched in his hand, almost as if ready to toast. But his eyes were closed, and he was snoring.

Other soldiers were scattered about, some already beginning to stir. The guard patrols had bags under their eyes. James recognized the look on their faces. It was the look of a duty shift that had gone too long because the replacement soldier had screwed you over.

James picked up a few mugs from a table and emptied them. Then he handed them to Amina.

"Grab some water." He said as she took them. "I'll see if I can scrape together enough leftovers to make us a decent breakfast. Or at least a filling one."

"Okay." She said as she staggered over to the nearby drink table. Her head was pounding.

He managed to scrape together a bit of pork, some bread, and a few roasted potatoes. He put the metal plate on the last coals of the fire from the night before to heat them up a bit. When Amina tapped him on the shoulder he took one of the mugs of water and drank. His head throbbed a bit, but it was survivable.

The two of them ate in silence for a while as they tried to recover. Eventually Kela staggered over and sat on the opposite side of the fire. She grabbed a chunk of the pig that was still on the spit, scraps mostly, and began gnawing on it. Bone and all.

"How was your night?" James asked her. "You and Bark.... whatever his druid name is.... have fun.?"

She stared off into the distance, still chewing the piece of bone that was in her mouth. Then she answered.

"Yes. His druid training has taught him much since last we met." She said at last. "He and his partner are going to stop by the house in a few months when they meet up in the capital. We're going to see if Jurl and I can get a new willow tree in the yard." Then she went back to staring into the distance again.

"His partner isn't the fox is it?" James asked.

"I.... I don't know." Kela admitted. "Can I have some of that water?" She asked. James leaned over and handed her his half empty cup. She drank it in a single gulp.

"Last night got out of hand. Didn't it?" He asked.

"A little bit." Kela replied.

"I warned you." Amina stated.

"Yeah." James admitted simply.

The three of them ate their halfhearted breakfasts as they tried to recover.

\----------

Several hours later James kneeled next to what he was here for. He had his phone out and was recording it, snapping pictures and recording footage.

Even as he interacted with it, he knew that he wasn't going to be the one to figure this out. Whatever this was, it was so many paygrades higher than anything he knew about, and so many degrees outside his field of knowledge.

The mages had given him some basic rules.

1. He had to remain tethered at all times.
2. He could touch it, and even press his hands or feet into it, but no further than the elbow/knee, and no putting his head in it.
3. If he put anything in it that wasn't tethered, he would be risking its loss.
4. No magic near the blight.

As a result, James was tied to a nearby tree. The rope was attached to a harness that cinched around his legs, waist, chest, and shoulders. He'd also attached a piece of string to the thumb loop on his phone and tied it to his wrist. He'd left almost everything else at the nearby research tent.

It was difficult to explain what he was looking at. In fact, it was hard to even look at, physically. Any time he looked at it his eyes and head felt the sudden urge to look elsewhere. He tried staring at it and after a few seconds found he'd turned and was looking at the grass next to it.

The patch of vanishing blight he was looking at was actually one of the smaller examples in the area. There were a few others near enough that he could see them. But this was the one that the researchers liked to use because of its size. They assured him that a mile away there was a patch that was nearly half a mile wide.

After seeing this one, James feared going near the larger one.

He looked back to see Amina and Kela standing near the tent. He nodded and gave them a thumbs up.

He couldn't describe what he was seeing. Vanishing Blight was as apt a name as it could be. It was absence. It was like looking at a physical manifestation of.... nothing. When he looked at the pictures on his phone some it looked like old movies where the film had been burned through by the projector. Other pictures made it look like a staticky TV screen. One of the pictures just showed a hazy black smudge where the blight was supposed to be, as if he'd had something on his camera lens.

He was scared of this thing. But he was also curious.

He reached out his hand, edging closer on his knees as he did, and reached into it. He stopped at the last second. Was he really going to do this? What was going to happen to his hand? What was it going to look like once it was in there?

James decided to rip off the Band-Aid and reached in up to his elbow suddenly.

"What the fuck?" He asked. What the hell kind of sensation was this?

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Wait, is this just GATE? (58/?)

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Writer's note: Cute stuff. Bonds of friendship. JOOOOKES *^((what are thoooooose?!)**)**.*

Oh yeah and just a daaaaash of intrigue.

Enjoy.

\~

James was incredibly perplexed.

He stood, one hand on his chin, the other resting on his hip, staring at something that made absolutely no sense.

"What am I looking at?" He asked, rhetorically.

"That, James." Said Kela, in an incredibly grim tone. "Is the greatest threat our nation....no, our world, has ever seen." She continued. "And if you can find a way to fix it, or even better get rid of it entirely. You'll have earned your title of Summoned Hero. Once and for all."

James turned to face her, noticing once more how close she was to being fully human. "I.... I don't know if I'm up to the task Kela." He looked back at the issue at hand. "I don't think anybody could possibly fix this."

Artair sighed. "Yes. Haha. Very funny." He said at last. "Look, just because other adventurers don't wear their favorite night wear while they're travelling doesn't mean they shouldn't. We have bottomless bags for a reason. I, for one, choose comfort."

He stood up fully then, stretching. James and Kela had been carrying one of the tents toward Maxel to put into one of her saddle bags when the prince had emerged from his tent. Wearing a light blue night gown.... and fuzzy slippers, that James thought looked like sloths.

"Dude." James said. "You never get to pretend to be cool again."

"Judge all you want. I value my comfort. And I hate being barefoot in the wild." The prince huffed.

"Want us to pack your fuzzy slippers up for you? Your Highness." Kela added.

"I'll turn you into fuzzy slippers." Artair grumbled as he walked towards the nearby tree.

James and Kela watched him go, then looked at each other, and simultaneously began laughing.

\----------

It was the second day of their travel from Jadesport. James felt great, his injuries were all but healed. The weather was great, if a little chilly. Plus Amina was riding behind him, her hands resting on his waist or shoulders. She'd occasionally take short naps, leaning her head on his shoulder from time to time. Gixelle rode maxel a few yards behind them, grinning any time she noticed them.

It was a nice trip. But he couldn't help but be anxious.

They were expected to reach the monitoring camp a few hours before dusk. The king had sent a portion of the military, and several Mages, plus an arch druid, to monitor the vanishing blight and study it as much as they could. Amina's uncle was running the place.

James passed the time practicing his wind magic. Any time they passed a tree, or really anything, James would do the motions with his hand and try to impact it a different way. He tried the slice that Veliry had shown him, and even managed to get a few leaves off of a tree. But not by cutting them, they just blew off. What he could do was blast the crap out of stuff. One gust he sent caused a sapling to lean so far that its roots started to pull up out of the ground. And when he sent a high pressure

blast, doing what he could to recreate his emotions from the battle while he did, he'd managed to completely obliterate a section of a road sign.

He'd decided to not do those kinds of wind attacks unless he had to. This thought was only cemented by Veliry chewing him out as he and Kela held the sign up while she magically mended it.

But on the plus side, she'd told him to start working on earth magic. She'd told him the signs, and how to do them with the left hand since he was apparently more magically adept with his left. She'd also told him what to visualize as he did it. His task was to summon a stone column from the ground, any size would do.

Now that he knew what magic felt like, it was becoming easier. He hadn't managed a column just yet, but he had managed to make the ground rumble, and had caused a few bumps and holes to form. He'd get it soon enough.

Kela had finally opened up again. Gixelle had fallen back for a bit and spoken to her as they rode. Afterwards, during one of their breaks, she'd approached James and Amina as James was watering Steve. The drake had eyed Kela for a moment, then simply huffed and gone back to eating. The two of them had grown more comfortable with each other since the battle.

She'd asked for their forgiveness and apologized repeatedly for failing to protect them. James and Amina had both assured her that it was okay. They were, for the most part, fine. And the grabber clan was officially routed and being hunted down. Amina reminded Kela that she'd also been leading the charge to save them.

After the, highly emotional, conversation they all sat and ate a light lunch, some bread and cheese, and James's new favorite fruit, dipped in salt.

\----------

Sure enough, as the sun was beginning to turn the sky orange, they saw the monitoring camp.

James reached up and tapped Amina's forehead to wake her up. "Hey, we're here." He said as she stretched and yawned. Naturally, he yawned as a result.

"So fast?" She asked.

"Fast? You've been dozing for almost two hours." He replied, chuckling.

"No I wasn't." She countered.

"Your snore is adorable, for the record."

She jokingly slapped the back of his shoulder. "I do not snore." She said. Then she placed her hands on his shoulders and rested her head on his right side. "It'll be good to see Uncle Sigbert again."

"He's on your mom's side, right?" James asked.

She nodded. Then when she realized that he wouldn't have seen that, she added. "Yes. Though, technically he was my mother's uncle. My great uncle."

"Great uncle. Got it." He said. "Anything I need to know?"

"Be ready to drink. Uncle loves to welcome new friends with ale."

James was not ready to drink again. The last few times had nearly gotten him killed, in numerous ways.

"Fine. But you're keeping an eye on me if I get too drunk." He said.

"Good luck with that. I'll probably be the one that needs watching." She replied. "And don't think I didn't miss that joke."

"What jo-" James started, before realizing what he'd said. "Oh, right. Sorry. Completely unintentional." He leaned back a bit and bumped his head into hers lightly. "Mean it."

"I know." She said, smiling.

\----------

The camp felt oddly familiar to James.

Sure, the tents were red and black, and had banners on top of them. But other than that, he felt like he was back on the FOB.

This was a military base. Some things might've been different. But he could tell that much.

Sigbert on the other hand, was not what James had expected.

When Amina had told him that Sigbert was her uncle he had expected.... well... a human.

Sigbert was not a human. Sigbert was a damn giant. Or at least he was to James.

Sigbert, was at least seven feet tall. Despite the fact that he was wearing his royal uniform, armor included, he was also very clearly very muscular. James had a feeling that even Gixelle wouldn't be able to outfight this guy in a boxing match. He also had a mane of greying blonde hair and a matching beard that went down almost to his stomach. On his belt was an axe that would have required James to use both hands to even lift.

And then he smiled, and the illusion was broken.

"MINI-MINAAAAA!!!" He yelled as he jogged up.

Steve raised up, threatened by the large man running at him. But Sigbert ran right past Steve's open maw and ran up to the side. Amina hopped down off Steve's back and right into the giant man's hands. His hands almost completely enclosed Amina's waist. The two of them hugged tightly.

"Aw, me wee little niecey!" He exclaimed. "It's been too long."

She pulled back a bit. "Too tight uncle Bert. My ribs are still sore."

He quickly lowered her to the ground and released her, leaning down to recomense the hug. "Sorry lass. I'd heard you were hurt. I just forgot." He pulled back a bit and looked at the eye patch. "Looks like those bloody grabbers got you good, eh?"

She looked down, embarrassed. "Yeah." She admitted, still sad about the status of her eye. Then she looked up and wrapped her arms around his neck. "But it's so good to see you uncle. Even if I'm only half seeing you." He hugged her again.

As James tied Steve to the nearby post, he turned to Gixelle, who was tying up Maxel.

"Ummmm." He began. "I.... Don't see the family resemblance here." He admitted.

Gixelle just smiled coolly. "He's part of the old part of her mother's family. There was a bit of Giant's blood in there. But there was also some dwarf." She stated simply. "Lots of height variation in that family. I'm sure you've noticed that your beloved is a little tall for a woman."

James blushed. "Yeah, but so are you." He countered.

"Yeah. And there's giant's blood in my family too." Gixelle said simply. "Also, I'm so glad you didn't deny the 'beloved' part. My little drake rider is growing up." She said mockingly.

Behind them Artair, who'd been tying up Xhalya, gagged. "By the gods. Would you two please not talk like that around me. I hate it." He said.

"Right. I'm leaving." James said, before things could get any more awkward. He began walking towards the two reunited family members.

He let them continue talking for a few minutes. But when it became obvious that they weren't going to stop any time soon, he cleared his throat. Sigbert looked at him.

"Ah, you must be the Hero then?" He asked.

"Hi." James said as he took a step forward, hand out. "Please, just call me James."

Sigbert took his hand and shook it rapidly. James felt the bones grind against each other. He did what he could not to show his pain.

"I hear that I owe you greatly young man." Sigbert said as he released James's hand.

"Oh? What for?" James asked.

"Well, mainly for saving my lovely little niece here. The reports we got back from the Jadesport couriers told us that you made those bastards pay in blood and bodies." He said. James was about to speak when he continued. "Plus. If the gods aren't playing a trick on us. Then you're also here to finally clear up the mess that we've been trying to figure out."

James gulped. "Well. I'm here to take a look at it. Can't promise any more than that." He said, trying to hide his anxiousness about the matter.

"Well." Sigbert said as he stood back up to his full height. James craned his neck up to keep his face in view. "We can deal with that tomorrow. The site's about two miles from here. For tonight," He said. "We'll welcome you to the camp. Now come on. We'll crack a few casks of Ale." Sigbert clapped a hand on James's shoulder and began leading him into the camp.

James looked at Amina, eyes wide. Amina just smiled.

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Five miles to the east, closer to the coast, standing on a hilltop and looking through a pair of looking glasses, stood a blonde man. He was wearing a green cloak that made it hard to see him against the trees behind him. In the looking glasses the man saw James very clearly. He noted the green medallion hanging from James's neck. He also noted the people James was travelling with.

Especially Amina, with her new eye patch.

He looked around for a bit. Noting other important details. Then he panned towards the west, and looked at the patch of blight that the camp had been set up to monitor. He had to admit; it was an interesting conundrum this odd "vanishing blight".

But it wasn't his conundrum.

The blonde man smiled. Then turned and left.

He had plenty of time to do what he'd been hired for.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (57/?)

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Writer's Note: Happy New Year's Everyone. RIP Betty White. Snow's finally cleared, but I'm also on vacation still. So this is a short one. Granny Gixelle is made very happy in this one. Also, this is the last we'll see of Jadesport for a Looooong time.

Enjoy.

\~

James and Amina, despite all the unpleasantness of being injured, enjoyed the two days they spent at the hospital.

They leaned on each other when they walked. Once James's shoulder was done healing, he switched sides so that he could walk on her blind side. This helped her avoid tripping or bumping into things and people on that side. An additional benefit of being on her blind side was that it kept her from seeing James blush whenever she gripped his arm tighter.

He taught her how to play Go-Fish. She taught him a game known as Sheathed Dagger. It played a lot like War, except that the face cards had special abilities, also aces exploded, and sixes (for whatever reason) were the most powerful card in the game. He had a feeling that she was making the game up. But upon request, an attendant brought out a startlingly similar deck of cards. The only real difference being that the face cards were the Dragon, the Wizard, and the Assassin. Once he'd seen that, their abilities in the game made a lot more sense.

On the third and final day Amina was cleared to leave the hospital, so long as she returned for one last healing session. After that she could stay the night or go on her way. Gixelle and Veliry joined them as they went out to see the city, and to grab some dinner. Kela stayed at the Inn to continue preparing for the rest of the journey. James had a feeling that she was avoiding them.

They walked the city for nearly 4 hours before Amina had to stop. Her shoulder and leg were hurting, and she was getting tired of all the people looking at her, she hated large crowds, and as much as she liked the opportunity to shop, or get food, once again. She was growing weary of the city. James told Gixelle and Veliry to head back to the Inn, he and Amina would rest a bit and then he'd take her back to the hospital.

"After all, my ankle is hurting pretty bad too. I could use a break." He said as he hopped lightly toward the nearby bench.

"Are you sure?" Veliry asked.

"Yeah. Yeah." He assured her. "I don't know about Amina, but I think I've seen my fill of the city for the day anyways."

"Amina?"

"I have to agree with James." She said as she caught her breath. "I grow tired of these crowds." Even as she said this, people were watching them from nearby.

"Well, alright then." Veliry responded. "Gixelle, do you have anything left that you want to do?"

Gixelle thought for a moment. "Nah. I just need to check on Maxel, and I can get Steve for you too." She said to James. "Other than that, I'm good with calling it a night."

"Thanks." James said. Gixelle just nodded.

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As they walked back to the hospital a few minutes later, arm in arm, James asked the question he'd been curious about for several days now.

"Does your brother really have to come with us?"

She sighed. He'd already asked her this a few times over the past two days. "Sadly. Yes." She replied. "Gixelle is only staying with us until we get to the blight. After that she's continuing north. And you still need someone to teach you about drake riding. Plus he'll be a good addition to your swordsmanship training."

"Uuuugh." James groaned. "But does he HAVE to?" He asked again.

"We could use the extra protection. You and I may be just about healed, but we're still gonna be riding rough for a while." She answered. "If more trouble arises, Artair will be up to the task. Hell, he's done more adventuring than I've ever done."

"I just can't stand that guy." He complained.

"So you've said." Amina admitted. "In fairness, he's made it clear that it's mutual. But if my brother says that he's going to do something than there's really no stopping him. And he said that he's travelling with us. We can't exactly stop him."

James decided to change the subject. "You feel up for the trip?" He asked.

"Well, I'm still sore, obviously." She began. "So are you for that matter. I'm guessing Gixelle is too, though you'd never know it from looking at her." She put her hand over the eye patch. "And I'm still not used to this." She said meekly.

"Has it gotten any better at least?" He asked.

She lifted the patch and looked around. "No." She admitted after a few moments. Her head dropped, dejected.

James stopped, causing her to stop too. Abruptly he grabbed her shoulder and turned her towards him. He looked her in the eye.

"Hey, You'll get through this." He said. "And if the doctor can't fix your eye when he gets here, then I'll just keep watchin' your left side." His RIGHT hand made a gesture in her blind spot, then he flicked his hand up and a blast of air made her hair blow back, surprising her. She laughed as she raised her hands to protect herself.

"James! Stop it!" She exclaimed, but she couldn't help but laugh as her hair continued blowing.

"There's the smile." he said as he lowered his hand.

She ran her fingers through her hair, getting it back to its normal position. Then the smile faded.

"Do you mean it?" She asked as she took his arm, and they began walking again.

"Mean what?" He asked.

"That you'd keep watching my left side."

"Well, of course. I said it didn't I?" He replied. They kept walking for a bit, and then she did something that made him freeze for a second.

She kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you." She said as she leaned into his shoulder.

James blushed, then smiled. "No problem."

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The next day, after one last checkup by the healers, James and Amina walked out of the hospital following Kela. Kela had a pack on her back that the healers had given her. It was loaded with more healing supplies in case either of them had any further issues.

They met Veliry, Gixelle, and Artair at the Northern gate of the city. Gixelle helped James into Steve's saddle. James held his hand down, and Amina took it, letting him help lift her up onto the saddle behind him.

Veliry blushed. Artair groaned. Kela and Gixelle just grinned.

"Well?" He asked after getting settled on Steve's back. "Are we going?"

The others mounted up, with Kela riding the horse that pulled Veliry's carriage.

Two days and they would finally be at the Vanishing Blight.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (56/?)

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Writer's Note: More snow. Yaaaaaaaay! -_-

Exasperated sigh.

Enjoy.

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Amina listened to James tell the story of their rescue.

The things he had gone through, in a single day no less, to try to survive. To try to save her. Her mind reeled at the sheer willpower he'd displayed during the battle. He'd driven himself to the brink of death, had even managed to manifest a combat spell, just to try to protect her.

And he'd done so with no forewarning, no knowledge of where they were, or what they'd been up against. He'd done it to survive. But most importantly, he'd done it for her. He'd forced himself to reach her again, and save her, by any means necessary.

And he'd succeeded.

As he'd been telling the story, picking at his food the whole time, Gixelle arrived. She'd just finished her last bit of healing and had gone to look for them when one of the workers had told her where they were. Gixelle confirmed James's story and filled in the parts that he hadn't been there for.

As glad as Amina was about them being able to defeat the Grabber Clan, she actually hated listening to it.

She'd been so useless. She was a warrior, a General in the Army. Her friends had had to fight through a small army of monstrosities, had been injured almost as badly as she had been. Some of the soldiers that had been dispatched had died trying to recover her and James. And she'd just been lying there unconscious the whole time. And now she was half blind.

She was wringing her hands, beside herself with disappointment in herself, when she felt a hand rest on top of them. She looked up and saw James, smiling again.

"Hey." He said. "It's okay."

"No, it's not.' She said, shaking her head. "You almost died because of me." She turned to Gixelle. "And you lost your hand. And what did I do? I was just lying there."

Gixelle laughed and placed her hand on Amina's shoulder, chewed the piece of bacon that was in her mouth and spoke. "As you can see princess." Gixelle waved the hand in front of Amina's good eye. "I'm just fine. Nobody died. We're all fine."

"Besides." James added. "If we hadn't done it, you'd have been sold to some creepy 'smiling blonde guy'. Who knows what they would have done with you? Besides, now I've got dope ass magic. Worth iiiiittt." He joked. Amina couldn't help but chuckle at his odd slang.

"Yeah. If we hadn't come to get you, your father would have sent the whole army to get you. Might've even started a war with whatever country that blonde guy worked for too." Gixelle said. "Who knows how many people would have died then?"

Amina realized they were right. Still, it didn't make her feel any better about what had happened. James squeezed her hands.

"Hey. We're good." He said when she looked at him. "I'd do it again if I had to."

She smiled, but only a little.

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After breakfast Amina and James went back to the room.

The healers changed their bandages and checked their injuries. By then Amina had gotten quite tired so James told her to get a nap in. He had to go check on Steve with Gixelle. Plus, he wanted to grab some supplies for the room.

It felt good to get back out of the hospital again. He'd always hated going to the doctors and, fancy jade/marble walls and magical healers or not, that's what the healing center was. Plus, it just felt good to get some fresh air. And he really wanted to see Steve. The poor guy had to be feeling as cooped up as he was.

He was wrong.

Steve was having a significantly better time than James had been.

When James arrived with Gixelle he found Steve laying, splayed out, next to his pen's sand bath, and getting his belly scratched by one of the stable attendants using a broom. Steve's bandages were gone, and his scars had already faded quite a bit, new scales growing over them in that dark purple that made him look black. Steve looked as though he'd run through a car wash.

Steve jumped, startling the attendant when he heard James's voice.

"What the hell is this?" James yelled before chuckling to himself.

Steve ran over to James and knocked him over into the straw with his head. Steve began licking James, his forked tongue coating James with rancid smelling saliva. Steve was rumbling in that deep, vibrating pitch that James had come to think of as his purr. James fought, feebly, to keep the massive drake's tongue at bay.

"Awww. He's happy to see you." Gixelle said.

"Oh god! It smells so terrible!" James exclaimed. "Stoooop!"

"I'll leave you two love-lizards to it." Gixelle said as she closed the gate behind her.

"Traitor!" He scolded her.

After a few more moments of wrestling with Steve, his shoulder complaining the whole time, James finally managed to free himself. He gave Steve some neck scritches to distract him, then he brought in the leg of beef that he and Gixelle had bought on their way over. Steve grabbed it greedily as James checked the scars on Steve's body.

"Got you good huh bud?" He asked as he checked the scar over Steve's eye. Steve just kept eating. "Good to see you again bud. I hate hospitals."

\----------

After visiting Steve, Gixelle took James to the Inn that she and Veliry had gotten for them. James retrieved some clothes for him and Amina, plus a few other things to help Amina pass the time. Veliry was there, and the three of them discussed plans. But they'd have to wait for Amina to be released before they could set anything in stone.

James walked back to the hospital on his own. He still had two more healing sessions before he was allowed to check out entirely. Besides, he wanted to keep Amina company.

Wonder how she'll like Solitaire? He thought. *Maybe I'll teach her Go Fish too.*

As he got to the front of the hospital, he saw a sight he hadn't expected. He sighed heavily as he approached the person that he just KNEW was going to be joining them on the rest of the trip.

"Why are you here?" He asked the new arrival.

"Oh, don't be like that *Hero."* Said Prince Artair as he tied Xhalya up to the post outside of the entrance. He patted Xhalya on the side of the neck. "No eating anything." He instructed her. Then he turned to James.

"Seriously." James reiterated. "Why are you here?"

"Oh, come now." Artair replied. "When we got word of what happened, my father deployed a company of the guard to come save you. I was cleared to ride, so I joined them." He began walking towards the doors. "Now I'm here to see how my sister is doing. I heard she got hurt pretty badly."

James sighed again. "You're joining us, aren't you?" He asked.

"Oh. Well of course." The prince replied with a grin. "It's going to be so fun."

James doubted that.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (55/?)

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Writer's Note: I'm fuckin tired my duuuuuudes.

Don't worry. Not from writing. Just because I've been shoveling snow, and pulling stuck motorists out of the snow. Weather's been rough. If I don't write for a few days just know that it's because The power's out, or I'm snowed in and playing Wintermute on its hardest setting... IRL.

Anyways. Enjoy.

\~

The next day Amina woke up feeling much better.

Her ribs were less tender. Her jaw didn't hurt as much when she yawned. She flexed her arm a bit and it only stung at its most extreme positions. The only thing that hadn't changed was her vision. Her left eye was still blurry.

Best of all, when she looked to the right she saw James in his bed, drool pooling beneath his cheek. The soft glow of bandages lit his right shoulder in that tell-tale soft green.

The healer, Morris Boneknitter, had told her that she would have to stay for another three days. She was almost done healing, but they wanted to keep her long enough to ensure that nothing unexpected happened. In the meantime, she could and, he insisted, should move around the facility as much as she wanted. He'd assured her that getting up and moving would help get her back on her feet and help them find out if anything else was hurt that they might have missed.

So, with great difficulty, she put on the robes that had been laid out for her. The robes fit easily over the simple tunic and shorts that they'd had her in. Though she did struggle somewhat with getting her injured arm into its sleeve. She also put on the simple leather eye wrap that the healer had left her. She already hated it.

Once fully dressed she slowly limped over to where James was sleeping and sat on the side of his bed. She let him sleep for a moment, smiling at the drool running down his cheek. Then she nudged his leg. After a few nudges he began to stir.

"Huh?" He asked groggily as he licked his lips.

"Wake up James." She said as she looked out the nearby window. "It's late morning."

"Amina?"

"Yes." She answered. "Come on. I'll need help finding some breakfast."

He sat up and Amina got her first good look at the bandages on his chest. She'd seen them the night before, but she'd been distracted by her own injuries. As he removed his blanket, she also saw one wrapped around his right ankle. His right eye had the last few hints of pooled blood in it.

"Yeah... Yeah. I'm up." He said, clearly still waking up. "I'm up. Wonder if they have coffee machines here?" He asked as he stood up.

He staggered just a bit, losing his step on the bandaged leg. He stretched it for a second, grunting as he did. Then he grabbed his robe and put it on. He pulled his medallion out from underneath and rested it on top of the robe. Then he rubbed the drool off of his face.

She was also surprised to see that he had more than a bit of stubble on his face. She wondered how long he'd gone without shaving.

"What's a coffee machine?" She asked.

"God's gift to hospital workers." He said in a startlingly deadpan voice as he finished tying his robe. He limped over and held out his arm. "You mentioned breakfast. Truth is you'll be more use than I will. I can't read the damn signs yet."

She took his arm and let him help her up. The two of them began limping toward the door, arm in arm like that.

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It took them a while before they got to the dining hall.

As they walked, she had to get used to being blind on her left side. She bumped into several people and pieces of furniture before James opted to

switch sides with her. Then they realized that their injured shoulders made that somewhat difficult and switched back.

When they finally got there James sat her down and went to the window to get them food. She looked around, trying to become accustomed to seeing with the one eye. Depth perception was all but gone. As she was looking around James placed their food in front of her and sat down on the other side of the table.

"Getting used to it?" He asked as he speared a piece of apple on his fork.

"No..." She said meekly. Suddenly she wasn't hungry anymore. But she still picked up a piece of egg and put it in her mouth.

"We'll get it fixed, you heard the doc. They have some eye specialist on the way." He said, smiling.

"Yeah, from Estland." She replied. "That's almost three weeks away.

"That far?" He asked. When he saw the sad expression on her face he smiled. "Hey. That's not so bad. Besides, you're a princess. I'm sure they're bookin' it to get here faster."

"Yeah.... Sure." She said glumly.

They sat like that, in awkward silence, as they ate their breakfast. After a few minutes Amina asked the obvious question.

"What happened?" She asked. "How did you guys get hurt so badly? The last thing I remembered was trying to fight off a bunch of grabber bandits out of nowhere."

"That..." He began. "Was a lot of pain." He rubbed his shoulder as he said this.

Then he told her. And he didn't leave out any details.

\----------

Taman woke up tied to a tree.

His hands were tied around the wrists by some kind of thin, but very strong, black rope that looped around the tree several times. His feet were tied to each other at the ankle. He was only wearing his small clothes. His coat, shirt, pants and boots were missing.

What was happening?

He began looking around when he saw several large black containers at the bottom of a tree nearby. Then he saw a tent. At least he thought it was a tent. It was made of some kind of odd, splotchy, mixture of greens and browns. He wouldn't have even seen it in the forest if he hadn't been so close to it.

Through an opening in the "tent's" sides he saw some strange metallic looking devices. Some of them were emitting strange patterns of lights and one of them seemed to have odd images on one side of it.

He was looking at these, wondering what kind of mage or druid he had accidentally intruded upon in order to be abducted so. Or maybe he'd been kidnapped and sold to one for some experiment. He'd never trusted magic users. Hells, most people didn't.

"Hello?" asked a heavily accented voice from behind him.

He jerked his head to try to find the source of the voice. Whoever it was, they were behind him.

"Can you speak my words?" The voice asked. Taman was confused.

"Uhhh. Yes?" He responded. "I can.... speak your words?" He looked the other direction but still couldn't see the questioner.

"This is good." The person said. "We can have a speak. Apologize my words are bad."

"What?" Taman asked. "What the hells is going on?"

"Apologize. I need your.... assistances." Taman heard footsteps crunching across the ground behind him. He craned his neck. What he saw made his jaw drop.

Standing several yards behind him was a man wearing his clothes. But the clothes didn't fit well on them. Taman was a large man, his life as a carpenter had built up his muscles quite well. Gods knew that his wife liked his build.

But this man was a monster. Taman couldn't see his face clearly, it had some kind of mask on its lower half, and some strange, blue, curved spectacles over their eyes. Or were those it's eyes. But they were large. At least three inches taller than Taman was. Taman's clothes strained to conceal the "Man's" arms and chest.

"What do you want from me?" Taman asked. "Why are you wearing my clothes? Where am I?"

The "man" walked over next to Taman and kneeled. Even kneeling it towered over him. It looked at him intently, its weird blue eye things roaming over his face.

"I am needing... informations." It said.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (54/?)

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Writer's Note: Hope everybody had a good holiday. Weather's been a doozy here. Been busy trying to keep the snow/rain/cold/wind from destroying my house. All good though. Just tired.

Welcome back. And, as always; Enjoy.

\~

It was well into the night when Amina awoke.

She did so with great difficulty. Her head was swimming, memories of the short-lived fight before her capture running through her mind. She remembered seeing James get up and beginning to walk towards Kela. Remembered seeing Kela staring into the woods with her fur up. Remembered seeing James get hit on the side of the head by a clobber round. Remembered rushing to see if James was okay.

After that she only remembered fighting, and pain. Something had struck her on the side of the face. Whatever it had been, it had knocked her out immediately.

She'd come to a few times since then. But every time she had, it had been hazy and flooded with pain. Pain everywhere. She remembered hearing laughing. Waking up, only to be punched in the stomach when she'd tried to stand. Remembered feeling a cold stone floor and then feeling someone touching her. But not in a bad way. No, they were gentle. She remembered hearing a language that sounded familiar but that she couldn't understand. Then she'd passed out again.

That was the last thing she remembered before waking up. Everything after that was darkness and half-remembered, hazy, dreams. They were already floating away, like all dreams seem to, until they become relevant later.

As she slowly rose back out of the depths of whatever had happened to her, she slowly began to take in her surroundings.

She was staring at a ceiling made of the white and green stone that could only mean Jadesport. She'd always hated Jadesport. It was too crowded, and the green and white everywhere was just so.... bright. Someone must have brought her here.

But why would her captors do that?

It was as she asked herself this that she realized that, while she was looking at the ceiling, she wasn't looking at it with both eyes. Something was wrong with her left eye. She tried to reach her hand up to touch it and find out what was happening. But when she did, she found that her arm was in a sling and strapped to her chest. Her shoulder ached

and throbbed from the attempt. She looked down and saw the glowing green bandages of healing.

I must be at a healing ward. She thought. *Wonder how bad off I am?*

When she attempted to bring her right hand up to her face, she realized that it was being held. She lifted it up and saw a hand gripping it, albeit loosely, and then she followed the arm up to its owner. She was surprised at how happy she became to see them.

"Jmsh?!" She asked. Then she realized that she had a bandage wrapping her head. She lifted his hand and shook it. James began to stir. "JMSH!" She said, louder this time. At that, he woke up.

"Amina!" He said, grabbing her hand in both of his. He looked her in the eye. "Hold up. I'll go grab the doctors!" At this he bolted up from the chair he'd been slumbering in. "I'll be right back." He let go of her hand.

For some reason, when he did, she felt a sadness and fear enter her that she didn't quite understand. She was about to reach for him as he jogged over to the nearby door. Then she noticed that he was shirtless. She'd thought he was wearing one, but he wasn't.

He was wrapped in bandages. They also glowed that faint green color.

"Hey!" He yelled out into the hallway. "She's awake!" He beckoned to someone in the hall. "Come on guys. She's up." Then he turned and jogged back to the side of her bed. He took her hand back in both of his and smiled at her. His eyes were watering. Hers wanted to water too. She gripped his hand hard.

"Jmsh! Wert hrpnd?" She asked, getting frustrated at her inability to speak clearly.

"Stop talking." He said. "Your head's all wrapped up right now. Let the docs check your jaw out before you try to talk." He answered. He pressed her hand to his face. There were new scars on that face. What had happened?

The door opened and Amina saw Kela jog into the room. Her ear was bandaged, and her fur was patchy in places. She'd clearly been hurt pretty bad too.

"Amina!" She yelled. "Thank the gods."

"Move out of the way!" Yelled a stout, green robed dwarf as he pushed her out of the way. Behind him a young woman followed closely with a cart full of equipment and supplies.

"Sorry." Kela apologized as she quickly sidestepped into the room. She quickly strode over to the side of the bed that James was on and looked at Amina, a large smile on her face. Amina tried to match their smiles,

but her face hurt a bit when she did. Plus, there were all the bandages in the way.

"Oh good. The lad wasn't pullin' me beard." said the dwarven healer. "Glad to have you back in the land of the livin' princess." He pulled a small stool from under the bed and took a seat on it. Then his eyes began to glow red, and his hand took on the amber healer's glow.

He placed the glowing hand on her shoulder. Then he began placing it on other parts of her body. When he touched her ribs, she felt more aching, though it was dull, and she had a feeling that whatever had happened to them was almost healed. Then he placed his hand on the side of her head. The entire side of her head where he laid his hand stung tenderly when he did.

"Hmmm. Not bad." He said to himself. The glow of his hands brightened, and his left hand joined it. He placed them roughly shoulder width apart and held them about a foot above her. The glow encompassed her entirely. The red glow of his eyes brightened as well. The two colors, amber and red, seemed to mix. Like two differently colored vapors being stirred together by a light wind. Then, after several long moments, the glow faded, and he sat back down. "No, not bad at all." He said, as he sat back down.

"How is she healer?" Kela asked, a look of concern on her face. James just kept looking at her, smiling gently as he kept her hand pressed to his face. She felt the warmth of his breath on her fingers.

The dwarf rubbed his eyes for a moment. Then turned to his assistant and nodded. The assistant began preparing things on the cart. Then the healer turned back.

"Well." He began. "Obviously, she'll live." He grabbed a pair of shears from the assistant and began looking for an edge on the bandages around her face. "The shoulder's fine. Should be back to normal in a few days, just gotta keep putting greenies on it." Having finally found an edge he placed the tip of the shears underneath it. Amina held as still as she could while he cut them. "Ribs're fine. Be a bit tender for a few, but they're just about done. Who doesn't love tender ribs, ay princess?" He joked.

"How's her eye?" James asked, concern evident on his face. *So there is something wrong with my eye.* She thought.

"We're gettin' there lad." The healer answered as he began unravelling the bandages. "Her jaw's fine. It was swole up pretty bad, and the muscles got a tad shredded, plus we had to regen a few of your teeth hon." He said to her. "So, no eating jerky or hard tack for a few weeks. Not that I think a princess like you eats those all that often." He said with a wink. "We'll have you on soup and soft food for the next few days. But don't worry, you'll still be pretty enough for your hero here." At this he nodded in James's direction. Amina felt her face flushing. When she glanced at him, she saw that James was too.

Finally, the bandages pulled off the small wad of bandaging that had been placed over her eye. The light in the room was blinding and Amina winced. The healer grabbed her by her chin, but gently, and turned her to look at him.

The vision in the eye was very blurry.

"Ah." He grunted. "That's what I was worried about."

"Wha?" She winced at the pain that talking caused in her jaw. "What's wrong with it? It's blurry." She said.

The healer smiled sadly. "Well." He started, looking more closely at her eye, his eyes glowed red for just a moment. "We saved the eye. But it looks like it was damaged dear." He finally admitted. Then he sat back. "We tried. Raban did a damn fine job. But he's old, and ill equipped over there. Plus, you two were pretty bad off when he got ya." He turned her head a bit, but he did so to the left side of her face, and he entered the blurry part of her vision. "Lucky he was able to save it at all."

"So I'm blind?" Amina asked, tears started to form in her eyes.

"In that eye? For now? I'm afraid so." He admitted sadly.

Amina began to cry in earnest. She squeezed James's hand and felt him kiss it lightly. Kela placed one of her hands on Amina's shoulder.

"Hey now." The dwarf said as he turned her head back to where she could see him. "It could be worse." He continued. "You should count yourself lucky Raban was able to even keep you alive. You were in a bad way. Same for your hero here." He said, nodding to James again. "Besides. Some vision is better than no vision. We already told Healer Naemar, over in Estland, about your situation. He specializes in healing eyes. Once I leave the room, I'll send word of how you turned out. He'll be on his way as soon as he can be." He lifted her head up. "Don't lose hope yet deary. If anyone can save your vision. He can." He smiled at her. And this time it wasn't a sad smile. "Now." He said, looking at James and Kela. "You lot get out. I need to check her other injuries, and you two aint stayin' in here. She's a princess. She deserves some privacy. It'll only be a few minutes." He began moving to shoo them out.

James squeezed her hand lightly and looked at her as she turned to him. "I'll be right outside." He said, as he began getting up to walk out.

Just as he was about to grab the door handle, the door flew open, slamming into James and sending him sprawling. Gixelle's massive form entered the room. She was heavily bandaged too, especially around her left hand.

"Hells yeah princess!" She exclaimed as she burst in. "They said you were awake. I came as fast as I could!"

James floundered, trying to get to his feet. Kela rushed to help him up.

"What the fuck just happened?" He asked, clearly dazed by the impact.

The dwarf just turned to his assistant. "Go help the lad. Make sure she didn't just break his noggin." He instructed her while shaking his head. The assistant rushed to check on James.

James struggled to pick himself up using the side of his bed.

Amina chuckled, making her ribs ache a bit. Then she let the healer do his work. She could cry more later.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (53/?)

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Writer's Note: Fleshing out the city a little bit. Gixelle causes a bit of trauma.

Plus some other sneaky beaky stuff happening.

Enjoy whatever holiday you celebrate. I'll see y'all again after.

\~

After getting Steve and Maxel set up in their pens, Gixelle offered to give James a simplified tour of the city. Steve seemed incredibly happy to be in a drake pen without his muzzle for a change, and James couldn't help but smile when he saw Steve following Maxel from his side of the wall. Their pens were right next to each other and he had a feeling that Maxel was going to get annoyed as the night went on. But Gixelle had assured him that Maxel could handle herself, plus she'd keep Steve from using his fire.

The city's idea of how a port should work was absolutely nothing like what James had expected.

Instead of simply having piers extended out into the ocean, with a few dry docks here and there, Jadesport instead had a massive "U" shaped canal that arced through the city from one end to the other. There were a few off shoots of this canal, but the main curve was the primary waterway. Instead of ships tying off and offloading their shipments and people like normal, the ships passing through Jadesport would instead travel through the canal at their slowest possible speed. A series of cranes and nets, resting on large jade and marble arches, were in place. This allowed the cranes to grab larger shipments and move them off the ships as they moved, and then move them to their intended recipients as

needed. Smaller, less fragile, shipments would simply be thrown over the side of the ship into the nets, each of which was labeled, and their recipients could retrieve them at their leisure.

James was amazed at the simple efficiency of it. He and Gixelle sat at a small cafe drinking ale and eating sandwiches for almost an hour as James watched a large ship pass through the canal. Its crew had it completely unloaded before they'd even reached what Gixelle had pointed out as the halfway point in the arch. Once they reached that halfway point a new set of cranes began loading new cargo onto the ship for it to take back out to other ports. As a result; a slow, seemingly leisurely, float down the five mile long arch resulted in a ship's crew being able to completely unload and reload an entire ship in a little under three hours. And based on what James saw, they didn't even NEED the full three hours. A lot of the time the crew was simply waiting on the next crane or net.

After they were done the ship would either continue back out to sea, heading towards its next port. Or they would head down one of the small off shoots and tie off, letting their crew enter the city and relax until they were ready for the next leg of the journey.

After watching for a while, and after grabbing some extra food for Veliry and (James hoped) Amina, they headed back along their tour. She showed him some of the shops, they'd have to come back the next day to replace what the raid destroyed, and some of the bars and restaurants on the coast. The whole city had a laid back Mediterranean feel to James. The white of the marble construction that was prevalent only reinforced that idea. He felt as though he was vacationing in Greece or something.

But eventually they had to head back. James's anxiousness at being away from Amina was growing with every moment, and Gixelle could tell. They grabbed a few things and then headed towards where Veliry had told them they would take Amina.

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When they finally got there James found himself impressed once more. The healing building LOOKED like a hospital to James. Granted it was made of that odd marble and jade mixture that this city was composed of, but when he looked at it his first thought was still that it was visibly a hospital. If it had had a medical cross with a caduceus in it on a sign, it would have looked exactly like so many hospitals he'd seen back home. He half expected for there to be an ambulance waiting nearby.

There was even a desk with a couple receptionists sitting behind it as they walked in. One was a brown haired elf that was busy sorting through some paperwork. The other, and the one that helped them, was a small woman that reminded James of Veliry.

James asked her where they were keeping Amina, showing her his medallion as he did so. She directed him to the stairs and told him to head to the third floor, he could follow the signs to the Recovery Ward. James was about to ask Gixelle to help him with that, since he couldn't read yet,

when she did something that caused the young receptionist to recoil in horror.

As James turned to ask her for help, Gixelle reached into one of her bags and removed her detached hand and plopped it onto the reception desk. The receptionist helping them paled at the sight and stepped back. The elven receptionist turned when they heard this and, upon seeing the hand, looked as though he was about to throw up.

"Where do I go to get this put back on?" Was all she asked of the two horrified desk workers.

The small woman was frozen with fear and disgust. The elf shakily raised his arm and pointed at a set of double doors to the left. "Surgical Healing Ward." He said, eyes never leaving the hand.

Gixelle was unperturbed by any of this. She simply picked the hand back up. Waved her left arm (the currently handless one) at the two receptionists. Then walked off through the indicated doors.

"See ya up there James." She said as the doors closed behind her.

James looked back at the two horrified receptionists. He smiled awkwardly.

"Thanks for the hand?" He asked jokingly.

"Please. Just..... Go." Said the young woman.

So he did.

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It took a while for James to find the room Amina was in. He got turned around a few times, and at one point ended up in a room that had seemed to be some kind of botanical garden, with a small moss ringed pool of water in the middle. He'd been about to walk in further when one of the trees had begun speaking, asking what he was doing in the druidic healing room when he wasn't a druid. The encounter had startled him into running out of the door, images of Dorothy being pelted by apples running through his mind.

Luckily, after a while of cautiously searching he'd seen Veliry sitting in a chair reading from a book. She waved him over, signalling to keep quiet. Beside the chair she was in was a door, when he peaked through its small window he saw Amina lying in a bed. He could see new bandages on her head. A person in a green outfit was standing over her, their hands glowing amber as they moved over Amina.

"How is she?" He asked, whispering. "Did they say anything?"

"It's a little too early for them to be certain of anything." She answered, also whispering. "But they did say that it looked like Healer Raban and his apprentice did a good job given what he had access to."

He sat down at the chair next to hers, he winced a little at the pain that flared in his back. The wound there was almost healed, but it still stung a bit. "Well. That's good. Did they say anything about her eye?"

"No. Like I said, it's still a little too early to tell." She put the book down and looked at him. "How are you doing?'

"Well. As you saw, the back still stings a bit. And my ankle could sure use a rest after walking around with Gixelle all day. But other than that I think I'll be okay. Can't wait to get this sling off." He said, indicating his right shoulder.

"That's good." She said. "But I meant how are YOU doing?"

He thought for a moment. "I uh. I guess I'm alright. I know I'll be a lot better once she wakes up. And better still if her eye ends up being okay." He admitted.

"Good." Veliry said. "I think she'll be fine regardless of the eye. She's a tough woman."

James thought of how she'd punched him when they first met. "Yeah. Yeah she is."

"You ought to go in. You can see how she is. Ask the healer what they think now that they've had a few hours to check her out. Besides, they have a bed for you in there."

"They do?" He asked, surprised at the idea.

"Well. Yeah." She pointed at his shoulder. "You're still pretty beat up James. You've got at least a few more healing sessions to go before any of those issues clear up all the way." She pointed her thumb over her shoulder at the door. "Get on in there."

He stood up and walked towards the door. But he froze at the last second, his hand only inches from the handle. Did he really want to go in there? What if the healer didn't have good news? Why was he suddenly so scared?

"James." This wasn't Veliry speaking, but a rumbling familiar voice, whose owner he hadn't realized had come in. He turned and saw Kela standing near the door to the stairway. She still looked sad.

"Oh, hey Kel." He said. Glad at the distraction from his thoughts.

"What are you waiting on?" She asked. "Go on in and see her. It'll be alright."

He looked back at the handle, hand still only inches away. Then he looked back at Kela, whose ear was still only halfway healed. She gave him a 'go on' gesture.

He turned back and grabbed the handle. He took a deep breath. Then, for better or worse, he stepped through.

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Taman was having a lovely day.

The sun was out. There was a light breeze that carried the first hint of winter's approach on it. He had a pack full of supplies for his sister's loom, and a basket full of fresh food that he could share with his nephew and nieces tonight. It was Lena's day of age and he and Lacar were planning on playing out The Tragedy of the Five Moon Knights for the children together. Plus he had a surprise for Lena tucked into the supplies.

He only had a few miles of forest to go through before he got to their farm on the other side. He loved this trip, and always had a great time making it any time he visited. Lacar and his sister always warned him of the Rekling that supposedly called the forest home. But he'd never seen one, and everyone knew that Rekling only left the forest whenever they made raids. And he doubted they would ever raid a sheep farm and weaver's home.

Besides, he always ventured off the road a few yards and found the most delicious mushrooms. Every trip, without fail, he'd find at least a few dozen. They always helped make dinner better. Hells, he already had almost that many in the basket right now.

It was as he was making one of these short journeys off the path that things went wrong.

He'd bent down to take a knee and inspect a fallen log to see what kind of bounty it might have. Unfortunately there weren't any edible mushrooms growing on it, at least not any worth taking.

But when he stood up, someone grabbed him. They wrapped a strong, black-clad, arm around his throat. Another arm went under his left arm, lifting his arm up until it was raised up in the air. Then they began dragging him deeper into the woods, his feet barely touching the ground.

By the gods. He thought, suddenly scared. *It's the bloody Reklings. I never knew they were so big.*

The arms were strong. Gods they were strong. He was a carpenter, he had some of the strongest arms of anyone he knew. But when he struggled to free himself from this odd hold they had on him, he found that the arms wrapped around him felt as though they were made of unyielding iron. Nothing he did so much as made them budge.

Worst of all he could see his vision fading. The arm around his throat was choking him, but it didn't hurt, it just constricted his neck. And now his vision was going black.

He resisted. He did everything he could. He had to get loose. He had to warn his sister and brother in law. The Reklings were coming.

But he couldn't. He felt the attacker lowering him to the ground as he passed into unconciousness.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (52/?)

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Writer's Note: BEHOLD. Wholesome interactions between friends as they discuss emotions and things.

PS: Holidays are here. Don't be surprised if I don't post for a few days.

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Jadesport was, to put it simply, the most amazing city James had ever seen.

The capital city, for all its grandeur, was simply a city. It was medieval in style, and it was teeming with people from almost all walks of life from this world. As such James had been amazed when he'd first walked around it. How could he not be?

Jadesport made the capital look like a Renaissance Fair.

For starters, it was very obvious why it was called Jadesport now. The entire city seemed to be cut from a sort of marble that had long green veins of jade running through it. James wasn't sure if that kind of rock combination could even occur naturally back in his home. But the white and green coloration of the walls and all the visible buildings made for an incredible sight.

Speaking of walls, the ones surrounding the main part of the city were massive, at least one hundred feet high. Mounted at the top of the towers on either side of the gate were two large weapons that looked like Ballista on steroids. Curiously they had massive roped harpoons loaded into them instead of the standard bolts that he'd seen back on the castle walls. He could see matching pairs on the other gates in the distance.

To James, it looked like someone had smashed the Emerald City of Oz and Minas Tirith together into a port city. How the hell was THIS not the capital of the country?

"Holy shit." Was all James could manage when it first came into view as they came over a hill.

"Oh, yeah." Veliry said from the back of the horse she rode beside him. "You've never been here. I keep forgetting that somehow."

"So that's why they call it Jadesport?" He asked.

"Yep. This is actually where the Jade for your medallion came from." She answered. "Way back when."

He inspected the green medallion for a moment. He'd known it was some kind of jade. But he'd never thought that it might be from the city named after the material.

"Cool." He glanced at the carriage she was pulling for just a moment. "What's this place like?"

She shrugged. "Meh. Busy. Way too busy for my taste. It's basically the biggest port in the country. Only place that comes even close is Craterdom on the southwest coast. As a result Jadesport is also the biggest trade center in the country. Loads of people here, too packed." The small mage looked uncomfortable as she remembered this fact. "That's why I left. I hate crowds." She admitted.

"Wait. This is your home?" He asked.

"Well. Yes and no. I was actually born down south in Rookfarthing. But my father brought my family here so he could open up a Pipeweed distributing company when I was a child." She smiled a bit. "It'll be good to see them again."

"Oh, cool." He said. "So you get a little family reunion then?"

"Yes." She replied. "It's been a long time since I've seen them. I look forward to my mother complaining about how I don't eat enough." She chuckled a bit."

"Guess family's the same no matter what world you're in."

She considered this for a moment. Then she smiled. "That's kind of reassuring, honestly." She said.

They rode for a few minutes more before Veliry brought up what she'd been meaning to ask about the past few days.

"That was wind magic you used on those last three." She said. It wasn't a question so much as a statement of what she'd observed.

"Uhh. Yeah." He answered. He'd been lost in thought when she'd started speaking again. "I think it was."

"It was." She stated. "I was already flying towards you when I saw it happen. Guiding Kela to you, you know. I saw it."

"How did you see it? It was just wind."

"Hmm. Well, when I'm using battle magic, I use an incantation called 'the eye arcana'. It lets me see when and where magic is being cast, as well as let me know what kind it is." She answered. "Most college trained mages learn it. I use it almost instinctively at this point when I'm in combat."

"Huh." He had to admit curiosity about this. That sounded cool as hell. "I'm kinda surprised you get in enough fights to get 'instinctive' about it."

"Well. I didn't become one of the King's Arch-Mages by being cute you know?" She said sarcastically.

"That's not what I meant." He countered. "Just. Not something I expected is all."

"How'd you make it do that?" She asked, trying to get back to what he'd done.

"Do what?" He asked, thrown off foot by the change in subject.

"How'd you make it blast those guys like that?" She asked. "I mean. Those first three looked like they'd been shot through by one of those harpoons up there." She said, pointing at the city defenses ahead of them. "I had you trying to figure out how to make a puff of wind. We were nowhere near that kind of stuff. That's combat magic is what that was."

He thought back. Between all the blows to the head, blood loss, and adrenaline, he didn't have the BEST memory of everything that had happened.

"I... I honestly don't know." He admitted. "I still had half a mag in my pistol. I don't know why I didn't just use that. Would've been just as fast."

"Hmmm. What did it feel like? Also, did you do it with your left hand? Cause that's what it looked like. I thought you were right-handed?" She asked these questions rapidly. It was clear to James that she was back to her super chatty self from a few days before.

"Um. Well. It felt like..." He thought back again. "It felt like my whole left side, from my chest all the way to my fingernails, was... I don't know... energized?" He thought for a second. "Like someone had just given my left arm the biggest electric shock of its life. But not painfully." He said. "For a second it felt like I could use that arm to punch god in the face."

"Interesting. What were you thinking of at the time? What were you focused on to make it happen? Was it your breathing technique like I told you?"

"Um. Honestly? No." He admitted. "I just.... I wanted them to get away." He gestured back at the carriage. "I didn't want them to hurt her anymore."

"Oh." She said. He looked away for a second. "I guess that makes sense."

After a few moments he turned back. "Thanks." He said.

"For what?"

"Well... For saving us. You guys found us, you specifically got me my pistol. Plus you know..." He did the hand motions, felt the energy course through his arm, but with less intensity this time. He aimed at a tree as they passed and hit it with a gust of wind. It's leaves fluttered and the tree leaned back as though in a storm before settling back. Kela and Gixelle looked back at them curiously.

Finally, he said. "You taught me magic."

She smiled. "You're welcome."

They continued riding the few hours it took to reach the city gate.

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When they got to the gate the members of their guard escort bid them farewell and began making their way towards their barracks to report back in. Kela accompanied them to submit an official report of what had happened in the battle and to coordinate with the local commander. She promised to meet back up with them before dinner time.

Gixelle and James had to go to the exotic stable to house Steve and Maxel. James was reluctant to separate from the carriage for so long. But Veliry assured him that the healers ward was only a few blocks into the city, and the mayor had dispatched several Jade Watchmen, the city's highest-ranking guards, to escort them and stand watch when needed, as well as guide them around the city.

James admitted that it sounded like everything was well handled and left with Gixelle. But he couldn't help but glance back at the retreating carriage a few times before it rounded a corner and disappeared.

"How's the hand?" He asked, after they'd ridden in awkward silence for a few moments.

"Don't know. It's on ice and in a bag dimension so I imagine it's cold." She replied.

"You know what I meant."

She held up the stump of her left arm and looked at it. "Eh. Had worse. I've actually had this hand cut off once before. At least this was a somewhat clean cut."

"Really?"

"Oh, yeah." She said. She held her left arm up as if trying to touch her chin, then realized the mistake and lowered it again. "Last time it was by an old sentinel statue in a crypt. Damn thing's blade was jagged, made for a rough cut."

James stared at her in horror. "What other injuries have you had like that?" He asked hesitantly.

She looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "You have seen a bunch of the scars all over me, haven't you?" She raised her shirt a bit to remind him of the heavily scarred flesh beneath. "Be easier to tell you what hasn't been hurt at this point."

"Eh, fair enough I suppose." He responded, thinking about how much that must've sucked over the years. "Just.... on my world, lost limbs are kind of a big deal."

"That's right they don't have magic where you're from do they?" She asked as she thought about all that implied. "Guess that'd make healing stuff like that a bit tougher."

"Yeah." He said, not wanting to think about healers at the moment. "Yeah. I'm not used to people being so.... laid back about healing."

"That why you've been standing guard over Amina?"

He thought about it for a moment. That was definitely one of the reasons. That was for sure.

"Something like that." He said at last.

Gixelle looked at him for a moment while he was thinking. "She'll be all right James."

"Yeah. I know."

"Do you? Or are you still thinking like you're in a world without healing magic?" She countered.

"Would it be a bad thing if I was?"

"Not at all." She answered. She turned a bit in her saddle, resting her right arm on the pommel. "Except that you aren't in one. In this world if a person hasn't completely died, then they'll probably be okay. Might lose a bit or two on the way to okay, but they'll get there."

"I know, I know. Veliry said as much." He replied, a little agitated.

"In fact." She continued, ignoring his statement. "In this world even death isn't always a guarantee that someone stays gone. But that's necromancy, don't go treading that territory. It's a good way to lose your soul. Or end up enthralled by a demon." She turned back. After a

moment she spoke again. "Amina's going to be fine. Might end up wearing an eye patch. But there's worse fates out there."

James didn't know what to say to any of that. So, he just kept riding, head hanging a bit as he thought. After a moment Gixelle laid her hand, or rather her stump, on his shoulder. James looked up at her. She looked him in the eyes.

"You James.... YOU... saved her." She turned back again. "Oughta make wooing her that much easier for you."

James blushed. But he didn't rebuff her this time. Gixelle considered that progress.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (51/?)

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It was just after dawn when they left Portview. James emerged from the healers home wearing his leather jacket against the light cold that had frosted the grass. His right arm was in a sling underneath it. He still had numerous bandages on underneath his clothes. But Amina needed to be brought to Jadesport, so today was the day.

He walked beside her as two of the guards carried her stretcher towards Veliry's magic carriage. It was a sad looking thing. It's once shiny, well waxed exterior was burned black on the back side, and its wheels were very obviously new and didn't match the rest of it. On top of that it was being pulled by a horse instead of the large bird that it had previously had. Inyria had been killed by the raiders the night they'd taken James and Amina. Veliry clearly wasn't happy to be sitting on this new mount. James couldn't blame her.

Kela wasn't exactly happy either. She was still beside herself with her failure to protect them. On top of that she was also relegated to riding a horse now. Her griffin had been killed along with Inyria, and the other griffin had managed to escape and was likely already back at the castle. She was keeping herself occupied by falling into her roll as captain of the guard. Checking and double checking their guard escort and marshaling them for the trip.

Gixelle, despite everything else, actually seemed untroubled by anything. The clan leader was readying Maxel with her good hand, often using her teeth to hold things in place while her remaining hand did the complex work. She seemed completely unphased by anything that had happened and, if James didn't know better, acted as though she was just readying for a morning stroll. But he could tell that she was upset too.

Once Amina had been loaded up into the carriage James made the long limping walk over to where Steve was. He'd asked the healers to focus on his ankle, so it was a lot better, but it still ached quite a bit. It was also bandaged enough that he'd had to put his army boots on instead of the boots he'd bought, then he'd tied them as tightly as he could. It was uncomfortable, and he'd have to loosen them any time they took a break, but the ankle would hold.

Steve was tied to a tree a few dozen yards behind the stables, his muzzle put back on until James could get to him. James could see even as he approached that Steve hadn't escaped the battle unscathed. He had a bandage over the shoulder of one of his arms, glowing that tell tale soft green that meant it was healing. He assumed Gixelle had put it there for him. But James could also see several fresh scars on various parts of Steve's body, including one that had landed just above Steve's right eye. James chuckled a little, it made it look like Steve had one raised eyebrow.

"I can smell what you're cookin' Steve." James said as he approached. "It smells like a bunch of drake shit and a rotting goat. But I smell it." He said this while dodging the half eaten rib cage of said goat.

Steve just lay there, watching him approach. James walked up and wrapped his good arm around Steve's neck, burying his face in the drakes fur. Steve sniffed at him curiously, then licked James's back with his long forked tongue.

"Uuuugh, you need another dust bath bud." James said as he pulled back. He and the massive creature looked each other in the eyes for a moment. James gave his snout a few pats and then removed the muzzle. "Thanks for savin' me bud. Thought I was a goner until I saw that fire of yours. Saved my ass, and gave me a bit of hope." With that he patted the drake one more time. Steve yawned, stretching his jaw now that it was free of the harness again. "Oh god." James said. "We need to invent drake sized tic-tacs." And then he walked over and mounted Steve's back while he was still sitting. The saddle was tucked away in Veliry's cage, he didn't want to anger his ankle by trying to use the stirrups right now.

With that, the group began moving again, towards Jadesport. James stayed close to Veliry's carriage, his pistol tucked into the sling so that his left hand could grab it if needed.

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"Power status?" Colonel Muhhamed asked.

"The Walters is connected and can divert power once we're ready. Base reactor is green. Power is good ma'am." Replied a tech in a light German accent.

"The device?"

"All sensors are reading optimal. On board AI is reporting no issues. Electro-Magnetic dampeners are stabilizing just fine. It's as ready as ever ma'am." Another tech, female this time.

"How's our man?" She said into a microphone that one of the techs had handed her earlier.

"I'm good ma'am. Beam me up and all that." Replied a gruff voice with a Boston accent.

"Last chance to back out Chief."

"And miss out on seeing Lord of the Rings for real? Not a chance ma'am." He replied.

With that the Colonel turned to the rest of the control room.

"Spin it up."

Techs and engineers began moving. Switches were flipped, buttons pressed, commands input on computers.

Down below the control room, past the blast proof observation windows, was a concrete room. It had several intricate devices placed around its edges, and numerous cables and lines snaking across the floor. There were five large devices all pointed at the center of the room from different angles and directions. They looked like large mounted weapons from an old sci-fi movie, and in a way that was what they were.

"The Walters is diverting power ma'am. Energy readout is good." Said the German tech. But she didn't really listen. She was watching the room below. She was watching the only person in that room.

"Breaching barrier in 3.....2.....1...." Said a different voice now. At one the lights in the room immediately dimmed as all reserve power in the facility was automatically disabled and rerouted.

In the room below there was a familiar sight for those present, or at least to most of them. A circle of bright red light formed in the concrete room, the darkness making it incredibly bright. It flickered for several seconds, then began to widen. After nearly twenty seconds it had reached almost eight feet in diameter.

"Breach obtained." Said the german. "Stabilizing.....now"

The red circle began to spin, slowly at first, but as it continued it picked up speed. It wavered a little, moving back and forth just a few inches, but it eventually resettled. Eventually it began moving so fast that it appeared to be a large glowing red ball.

"Aaaaaand stabilized. On your command ma'am."

"Chief Vickers." She said into the mic. "The door's unlocked. At your discretion."

The man in the room looked up at the observation windows. He gave a half assed salute and then jumped up and clicked his heels. He approached the red orb, tightening his shoulder straps and lifting the two large black hard cases next to him as he did.

He watched the red portal for a moment, readied himself, and then jumped into it. It wavered, almost seeming to retreat for just a moment as he entered it, then it resettled back into its original position.

"Translation instability." A voice said. "Nominal. All levels maintaining normal........ Translation succesful."

"Shut it down." She said. Another flurry of activity in the control room. Before her the red orb began to slow its rotation. The circular portal that it was made of became visible once again. After a few minutes it stopped entirely.

Then, as soon as it had stopped, it blinked out of existence, darkening the room below once more. After a moment the lights came back on. The room below was empty once more, minus all the devices that allowed the portal to be created.

She turned back to the room.

"Any signal yet?" She asked.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rmhmgb/wait_is_this_just_gate_52/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (50/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rjca37/wait_is_this_just_gate_49/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's Note: Short bit of backstory. Blizzard today has kept me busy and tired.

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It took two days before the princess could be moved.

The guards that had been sent as backup had been rallied at Jadesport, and had brought two of their best healers with them once they'd gotten the message from Veliry. They'd ridden hard through the night, stopping only long enough to change horses once they'd reached the town that James now found himself in.

It was a small town, almost frontier-ish in its size and layout. Its official name was Woodsend. But the locals called it Portview on account of being able to see Jadesport from the hill it had started on,

especially now that the forest had been cleared back from it. Its small size was why James and Amina had been put into the same bed. The town healer was an old man who was near retiring. His healing house had been filled with guards as a result of the battle, so the old man had given the two of them the spare room from his own house. He'd let the healers the guards had brought with them run his main building while he and his apprentice had focused on James and the princess.

That was where James had spent the two days before moving. Sitting, despite the healer's insistence that he should lay down, next to Amina. He kept an eye on her as much as he could, only stopping whenever he had to be treated, or use the restroom.

His assessment at the raider camp had been fairly accurate. Multiple broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, broken jaw, numerous bruises and lacerations, and a concussion. There was also a good chance that her eye would be blind. The blow that had broken her jaw and knocked her out had caused swelling that had damaged it badly. Only time would tell how it healed. The healers did what they could for her. They could heal her, but she had to be kept unconscious so that they could keep her from aggravating her injuries.

Two days. Then a one-day trip to Jadesport where they could get her to the city's best healers and into a larger, better equipped, room. Until then James wouldn't leave her side.

He wasn't much better off.

His ankle was broken, he'd torn muscles in both arms and his back, he had a slash across his back that had almost hit bone, he had a concussion too, two broken ribs, and the arrow that had pierced his shoulder had only barely missed his lung. The healers hadn't believed the guards when they'd been told that he'd been up and fighting when he'd been found. Veliry had confirmed that she and Kela had had to restrain him and use magic to put him to sleep.

Kela and Gixelle told him what happened, how the Grabber Clan had surprised them while they'd been setting up camp. Their camp's proximity to a well-travelled road, as well as Kela's diminished sense of smell due to her transformation, had prevented her from sensing the hiding raiders. Coupled with the grabber's ability to hide within the trees and you had a perfect combination for an ambush.

Kela was beating herself up as a result of her perceived failure. James could understand where she was coming from. He'd be doing the same thing if he was in her shoes. Still, they all assured her that it was okay. Everyone was alive, more or less.

Gixelle was as battered as any of them. Her hand had been frozen by Veliry and placed in one of her bottomless bags to keep it in good condition. The healers at Jadesport could reattach it. And as a Clan Drakrid leader she could afford for it to be done with almost no scar remaining. But her other injuries were extensive. Most of them were just lacerations, but she'd also been shot by several arrows and had more than

a few broken bones. But the aged warrior had forgone attention from the healers, simply grabbing bandages and tonics from her bags and handling her wounds herself.

According to the guards the Grabber Clan had likely been in the area for the past three months. They'd been getting reports of missing travelers and livestock roughly that long. Several scout squads had been sent into the forest to look for the cause. Most had returned with no useful information, but one of the squads had gone missing. Their armor and weapons had been found in the camp, or on the raiders after the battle.

Veliry hadn't joined them in the town. She'd gone with the uninjured guards to link up with the guards that had been dispatched from the town on the other side of the forest. They were going to comb the forest, using Veliry as a flying recon scout to speed things up. Plus, she wanted to find out where the Grabber Clan had come from.

James had asked about this. He'd never seen anyone like the members of the Clan. Gixelle had told him that he wouldn't in most surface cities. Grabbers and their riders were denizens of the Deep Dark, and only came up to the surface to raid and make names for themselves. That was why Veliry was looking for them. If they had come up than they either had a stone mage with them, or they'd found or created a tunnel to the surface. Whatever the case, it needed to be found.

James half listened to all of this. It was interesting, and he had no doubt that it might be useful information to have in the future. It was hard to focus on anything they were saying. Not while Amina lay there next to him, still unconscious, still hurt. He kept glancing at her, constantly checking that she was still breathing, to see if she was waking up.

He dreaded the day that they had to move her. He knew the healers had done fine work. Could feel it even, in himself. But habits from his world were hard to break, and he hated the idea of letting them move her.

They'd use Veliry's Carriage. It was damaged, but the enchantment on it was still working, and the local wheelwright was putting new wheels to replace the damaged ones. It would allow one of the healers to accompany them as they travelled, and it would prevent them from being jostled too much on the way. The guards from Jadesport were going to travel with them, so they'd be defended while the traveled too.

Yet still James worried. When no one was looking he would hold Amina's hand. He didn't know if she could feel it, but he thought she could.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (49/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/riwlq4/wait_is_this_just_gate_48/) /

[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Yes, a Saturday release. Didn't feel like hearing yall bitch about waiting a whole weekend. Plus, I wanted closure on the battle too.

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As he staggered between shacks, tents, and other shoddy structures, James knew that he was running out of time.

That familiar sense of everything "greying out" was beginning to creep up. His legs were slowly beginning to tremble. His reflexes were slowing down. And on top of all that, his head was killing him.

He was only staying on his feet because there was no other option.

He'd emptied two magazines since Veliry had managed to get his weapon of choice back to him. He could usually drop the "people" that he encountered in one or two shots. But the beasts that the camp occupants rode typically took two to four rounds to drop, their size, odd anatomy, and musculature making it hard to hit vital organs apparently. That and James's now faltering aim were making it difficult to proceed.

James leaned against a shack to catch his breath. It was getting harder and harder to breath now. He had to focus for a few minutes, consciously forcing himself to inhale deeply and exhale slowly before starting to move again.

He didn't notice the trail of blood that his shoulder left on the wall as he lifted off of it.

Another Grabber Clan member went running past, desperate to escape the encroaching fire and guardsmen. James didn't even notice him until he was already passing between two other structures. He raised the pistol feebly, then decided it wasn't worth the effort and dropped it back down to his side.

Why did his arm feel so heavy?

He rounded a corner, and finally saw his destination. The stone structure, looking like someone had hollowed out a boulder, stood only fifty or so yards away. To James it looked more like a mile. There were "people" milling about in front of it. It looked like they were looking inside.

He would kill them all.

"I'm coming Amina." He said slowly as he began staggering forward.

A rider came towards him. At first, they seemed to just be running. But when they saw James, they scowled and altered course to head directly at him.

"C'mon bitch." James said under his breath.

James aimed at the rider, but the creature it was riding weaved back and forth, and James's arm was slow to track it. Or was his vision the thing that wavered? Either way the rider approached, long curved spear-like thing aimed at him. He thought it was a halberd, or maybe one of those Asian style spear things. He wasn't sure. It didn't matter.

James waited until the last second. When the rider raised the weapon to swing it, James jumped out of the way, falling to his knees as he did. The rider flew past him, and James turned and fired from less than five yards away. One round punched through the rider just under its shoulder blades, the other drew a long slash across the thing's bicep, only grazing it. James rolled over on his side, bracing himself as he did and shot the monster beneath it in the side of its face as it turned to face him. Rider and beast fell down dead.

James stayed there for a second, catching his breath again. Then he slowly stood up again. He saw the people around the hut. They hadn't even turned to look at him. There was no way that they hadn't heard the gunshots. But they were focused on what was inside the hut.

He realized that that meant they were focused on Amina.

He felt strength surge back into him. His pains seemed to fade. His vision cleared marginally as he began to run towards them.

"GET AWAY FROM THERE!" He yelled, voice hoarse.

He felt something within him. It started deep in his chest. His left hand began making motions as his right arm hung limply at his side. Under other circumstances he would have recognized these motions. But he'd never done them with his left hand before. Veliry had told him to practice with his dominant hand, so he'd always used his right hand to do them. But somehow, they felt natural in the left hand, instinctive, they came to his fingers and wrist as though he'd done them his whole life.

He felt electrifying energy course from his chest all the way down his left arm. Every muscle, every nerve, every hair follicle and inch of skin felt as though a million volts of pure energy were coursing through them. But there was no pain from it. In fact his arm felt stronger than it ever had before. He felt like he could lift the world with that arm.

James couldn't see it and couldn't feel it. Not in his current state. But his hair, and all his clothes fluttered as though he was in a strong wind.

He punched his arm out, palm aimed at the three creatures clambering around the door, fingers splayed. And he felt a small puff of wind emanate from his hand.

But it was much more than that.

He'd approached the three oblivious enemies from the side. After his hand had punched out towards them the one nearest him stiffened suddenly. A small hole, roughly the size of a quarter appeared just below its ribcage. James saw blood splatter on the middle creature as the first one turned towards him, eyes wide in shock. As it did James saw that the other side had a hole the size of his fist in the opposite side of its abdomen. Then the creature fell limp, like a puppet with its strings cut.

The splatter of blood that James had seen hit the middle one had also contained bits of bone, and armor, and flesh. This mixture of the now dead creature next to it impacted the middle creature like a cannon blast, embedding the bits of its now dead comrade in its chest. This impact also propelled it sideways with bone crushing force.

James knew it was bone crushing because when the middle creature hit the third and final member of the trio, he could hear the bones cracking between them. The middle one slammed into its only remaining comrade hard enough that it continued upward past them and up over the next hovel. The third raider was propelled into the wall of the same hovel, flipping over sideways as they flew. They hit the wall with a sickening crunch, and as they slid down they left a trail of dark brown blood and flesh on the structure. They stopped just short of the ground, one of their legs stuck wedged between two loose boards.

James never even slowed down. Running to the door in the staggering gait that he'd had ever since killing the medallion thief earlier. He slammed into the opposite side of the doorway and lurched inward. His right arm throbbed from the impact with the door, and his limp hand dropped the pistol it had been loosely clutching. It clattered to the ground, useless. James didn't even notice. He was too mad at what he saw.

Another one of the dark orc-things, smaller than the others he'd killed, was standing there. It was holding the princess up with one hand wrapped around the ribs that James knew were broken already. James saw that she wasn't moving.

The creature stared at the doorway, mouth agape in shock at what it had just witnessed. It never got a chance to react to James's entry. His left hand flashed the gestures again. He felt that surge of energy like before, his clothes fluttering again as he did.

He raised his hand again, aiming at the orc thing's head. It's confused look had just a moment to change to one of anger. Then it exploded backwards, bits of skull and brain matter splashing the wall behind it.

The creature's now headless body took one jerking step forward, its empty-handed arm reaching out as if grabbing for something. James ran forward and grabbed the thing by its chest armor. His numb right arm finding a strength he was surprised it still had. Then he wrenched the dead thing back, throwing it out the now vacant door. It flew surprisingly far and rolled over the body of its dead compatriot before resting in the dirt, blood spurting from its headless neck.

With his left arm he caught the falling princess. He couldn't avoid the broken ribs when he did, but he quickly collapsed to his knees, readjusting his hold on her as carefully as he could.

He lowered her back to the ground as gently as he could, careful to not touch the injuries he already knew were there.

"Come on Amina." He said, tears forming in his eyes. "Come on, be okay." He cradled her head with his right hand, ignoring the flair of pain in his shoulder. He placed his left hand on her neck, first two fingers searching the area next to her windpipe.

In his state he struggled to find her pulse. Everything hurt, and his own pulse pounded in his head, making it hard to tell what he was feeling. He watched her good eye, looking for any sign of movement. But Amina remained motionless, and he was breathing too heavily to know for sure if she was breathing too. He felt tears begin rolling down his cheek.

"Come on Amina. Don't do this to me." He kept trying to feel the pulse. "Not again. Not another one."

He didn't see the light in the small room dim as someone took up the doorway behind him.

"Come on. Please!" He said, pressing his forehead to hers. "NOT ANOTHER!"

And then he felt two things.

A pair of large hands grabbed him by the shoulders, pulling him backwards. He thought it might have been another raider accosting him. But he had to stay. He'd just felt something more important than that.

Under his fingers, so lightly that he almost missed it, he felt a pulse.

"NO!" He yelled. "LET GO!"

A third hand placed itself over his eyes. It glowed a soft amber color. James suddenly felt sleepy. He tried to resist the effect. Clawing at the hands on his shoulders feebly.

"She's....." He felt heavy all of a sudden. "She's alive." But the hand on his eyes was so warm, and so gentle. He felt himself being pulled back, but they were doing it so gently. How could he not go to sleep? ^("Gotta help her.") He said softly.

And then everything went dark.

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James woke suddenly and tried to jump to his feet. But when he did, he yelped in pain.

His whole body hurt. He looked down to see a light blanket covering him. He lifted it and saw bandages, everywhere. Practically his whole body was

wrapped in gauze that glowed a light greenish color. He looked like a glow in the dark mummy. He tried to reach up to check if his head was wrapped too, but his right arm was bound tightly to his chest.

He looked around at his surroundings and saw that he was in some kind of building. In fact it looked like he was in a bedroom. But it wasn't one he recognized. Then he saw Kela slumbering on a chair to his left.

She looked almost as bad as he did.

She had bandages covering most of her body too. One of her wolfish ears was missing down to her skull, and he could see that most of the bandages were stained red and yellow. Whatever had happened to her had been pretty damn bad.

But he heard that telltale chainsaw running lightly as she breathed.

"Kel?" He asked. She stirred a little at the noise. "Kela." He said more firmly this time. His throat hurt.

She opened her eyes for just a moment. She saw him. "What?" She asked, half asleep.

"Wake up."

She opened her eyes some more. Then she realized who she was talking to, and then she shot to her feet. She quickly closed the distance between them and wrapped him in a hug.

It hurt. A lot.

"Thank the gods you're alive!" She exclaimed, oblivious to the pain she was causing.

"Kel-" He gasped. "That hurts my everything."

She quickly recoiled. "I'm so sorry! I forgot."

"It's all good." He said as he sank back down slowly. "I'm just gonna sit here and die for a minute. Oh god that hurt."

"We thought we'd lost you. Those damn grabbers!" She said, on the verge of yelling in her anger at them.

She was about to say more when James interrupted her.

"Kel stop." She looked at him curiously. "Where's Amina? What happened to her?"

Kela's face softened, but it also grew sad. "She's right next to you."

James's head jerked to his right. He hadn't even noticed that he wasn't alone in the bed. Lying next to him was the princess.

"She hasn't woken up yet." Kela said sadly. "The healers said that they only barely got to her in time. But it's still not good."

James tried to roll over to get a better look at her. But his injured shoulder prevented him from doing so.

"This is all my fault." Kela said as she sunk to her knees, placing her head on the side of the bed. But James was too focused on the heavily bandaged person in the bed with him. "It's all my fault."

Amina's head was wrapped in the glowing gauze. James felt fear seize him again.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (48/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ri0qpm/wait_is_this_just_gate_47/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: James is your huckleberry.

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For James and the orc thing, nothing else existed at this moment in time.

Flames raged outside the simple walls of the camp, it burned trees and raiders with equal ferocity. Members of the raider group scrambled every which way, grabbing weapons and mounting the terrible heavy limbed beasts like the one James was currently struggling on top of. Some of them tried to grab water and smothering devices to put out the now spreading flames. Horns blared, and somewhere outside the walls a great battle was occurring. James would have heard yelling, screams of pain and rage, the clattering of weapons and armor, and great beastly roars of anger and death.

But right now, all he could hear, all he could see, was the blood pounding through his veins, and the rage and fear in the face of the bastard whose life he struggled to end with the heavy chain he'd wrapped around its throat.

For these two beings, locked in this particular struggle to the death, only the other participant existed.

James strained every muscle of his body, his legs straddling the back of the terrible monster that his opponent was riding, his arms pulling at the chain with every ounce of strength they had. The monster was actually helping the effort, the sudden additional rider had startled it, the fact that its wrist had just been cut deeply and that the blade was stuck in

that wrist had hurt and scared it. As a result, it was thrashing about, forcing the choking rider to keep a hold of its reins with its left hand. The rider's right hand was up, barely keeping the chain from having full purchase on its neck, unable to engage James fully as a result.

They struggled like that for long seconds. James felt an impact on his right shoulder blade but ignored it. If he was hurt, he could deal with it later. Right now, he had to kill this creature by any means necessary. The Orc thing snarled at him, and James snarled right back. James lifted his left leg up and planted his knee on the rider's back, using it to add leverage and strength to the attempted choking.

As he did this, the ridden monster's back right leg came up, its odd three digited hand grasping for James's leg. Between his new position and his lack of awareness James didn't sense this new development. The hand latched onto his leg and James felt the bones in his ankle aching from the grip.

The leg began pulling at James, lessening the pressure his knee could force on the chain. He began sliding off of the beast little by little, straining to keep himself on top and engaged with the rider. But then as he looked down, he noticed that the rider was strapped into the saddle it was on.

It made sense; this thing climbed over everything in its way. If it could climb trees or walls, or cliffs like that too, then it made sense for the riders to need to strap themselves in. James saw at least two straps holding the rider in place. Suddenly, he had a plan.

The rider sensed James being pulled backwards and redoubled its efforts to remove the chain from its neck. So, it let go of the reins. It didn't see the cruel smile on James's face as it did.

James gripped the chain with everything he had. Then jumped up and back, just a little. But it was enough for the beast to pull him all the way off its back. James let it.

Just as he'd expected the arm-like leg used all of its strength, trying to throw him, or perhaps slam him into the ground. James held onto the chains for dear life. The beast strained to pull him, not realizing that it was dooming its master.

The Orc thing realized what was happening too late. It struggled to pull at the chain, but it was fighting against both James's strength and the strength of the monster beneath it. And that was a losing battle.

James felt his leg and back stretching, the muscles straining to keep everything in place. His arms burned as he clung on to his only hope of victory. The spot in his shoulder where he'd felt the impact burned and he thought he felt something there moving, jiggling ever so slightly.

But he held.

That agonizing moment, likely only seconds, stretched on for what felt like hours. But when it ended, it did so rapidly.

There was a light crunching sound that emanated from the Orc thing's neck. Its eyes bulged from the strain and fear of what it knew was coming. Its right hand was still under the chain, but its struggling was feeble. The left hand was grasping at the side of the chain, reaching for James's hand. But once its neck made that crunching noise the arm dropped back limply. James held for just a moment, groaning at the strain in his leg.

Then, he let go.

The beast swung him back and downward. James slammed into the ground and felt a piercing pain in his shoulder as an arrow stabbed clean through him and out the front of his chest, just below his collar bone. That answered the question of what had hit him. For what felt like the twentieth time today James felt the wind knocked out of him. But he had a feeling that the arrowhead sticking out of his chest was going to make this one last a lot longer than the last times.

James groaned, shook his head and then looked at the arrowhead. It was at least an inch wide at its base, and the wide end curved outward to wicked points. James reached up to try to grab it, but his right shoulder consumed him with pain when it moved. Instead, he reached his left hand over, the fingers curled from the cramps coursing through his fingers. He grabbed the shaft of the arrow, and before he could convince himself otherwise, snapped it just below the arrowhead.

"Hnnng! FUCK!" he exclaimed to no one in particular. Then he rolled over carefully, bracing himself against the ground with his left hand as he rose up to his feet. James looked around and saw the chaos happening around him.

Outside the wall, in the direction that the initial surge of scrambling defenders had run, James saw a fantastic sight. Leaping from tree to tree was a semi-armored blur of matted fur and blood drenched teeth that he recognized immediately.

Kela was moving faster than he'd ever seen before. Each leap took her into melee range of either a soldier or one of the terrible monsters they rode. A few seconds of flashing claws and gnashing jaws resulted in torrents of multicolored sprays of blood from her victims. She wasn't a perfect killer though, every so often a weapon would strike her, eliciting roars of anger and retaliatory swipes of claws that quickly silenced the weapons soon to be dead wielders.

He also saw Gixelle, who was higher even than Kela was staying, riding atop Maxel rapidly. He saw his shield, battered, missing scraps of wood, and riddled with arrows and bits of metal that he assumed were remnants of other weapons. Her massive sword, which James had always been amazed by, was moving with such vicious speed that James could barely see it. It didn't help that Maxel was moving rapidly from area to area at battle speed, a speed he knew put even Steve to shame. But no, Maxel or not, he

would have never been able to keep track of that sword. He could only momentarily see it whenever it had to change direction, and typically tracked it by the arcing trails of blood it left behind in the air.

He became very glad to count both of them amongst his friends.

It was as he was watching these amazing sights that he heard a noise behind him. He'd forgotten all about the beast that still remained behind him, its rider now flopping around in his saddle dead.

It was almost pitiful. In fact, if it weren't for its grotesque appearance and the anger that James still carried for both it and its rider, James might have even felt bad for it.

The thing was sitting on its hind legs. The front left arm that James had slashed at, that still had the short sword stuck in it, was cradled against its chest. Its other front arm was reaching up and trying to get the attention of its now dead rider. The creature's oddly human face looked sad, and it was making an odd low noise that James thought might have been whimpering.

James was about to turn and try to find the hut with Amina in it when he accidentally stepped on the green creature from earlier. When he did the thing woke up from its stupor and screamed, clambering at James's leg. James quickly stomped it in the chest killing it. But when he looked back, the monster was looking at him.

Its face was no longer sad. It was furious.

"No hard feelings?" He asked sarcastically, holding his left arm up in question.

The beast roared and began to charge. James readied himself to roll out of the way, preferably to the left he hoped. But before the creature could even get halfway across the distance between them, a massive bolt of dark lightning struck the creature in the face from somewhere above.

James shielded his eyes from the odd, somehow dark, light of the attack. There was an awful smell of burnt ozone and burnt hair and flesh as well. When the crackling noise of the attack stopped James lowered his arm.

The beast still stood where it had been. Its eyes had burst and one of the tusks protruding from its mouth had shattered. It spasmed once, and then keeled over sideways. Dead.

"JAMES! \[You're alive! Thank the gods!\]" James felt someone attack slam into him and wrap an arm around him. It had startled him, and he'd been on the verge of throwing the would-be attacker off. But then he saw a familiar head of scraggly red-ish hair.

"Veliry!" He exclaimed. "Holy shit, thank you! I thought I was gonna have to fight that thing with one arm." She pushed off of him, looking at him curiously.

After a second of looking at him she realized the issue. "\[Where's your medallion?\]" She asked. He couldn't understand her, but he could hear the exasperation as he realized the issue too. He held up a finger, giving the multi-versal signal to wait one second.

He jogged over to the disgustingly char broiled monster and its dead rider. He took a dagger from the rider's belt and slashed the two straps securing it to its saddle. The body fell, and James used his good arm to roll it over a bit onto its back. It took a few moments, but after pulling its "shirt" open he found his prize. He ripped the medallion loose and stuffed it his pants pocket. Then he turned back to Veliry.

"Better?" He asked.

"Much." She said as she hugged him again. He hugged her back.

"You have no..." He took a deep breath. "Idea. How glad I am to see you guys. What the fuck happened?" He asked.

"No time." She answered, pushing off of him again. "Where's Amina?"

His eyes widened. In his confused, happy, exhausted, state he'd all but forgotten about her.

"Shit!" He said. He grabbed her arm and began running. "Come on!"

"What? What happened to her?"

"She's hurt bad. We have to get to her. NOW!" He answered. She pulled him to a stop suddenly. "What?" He asked turning to see what she was doing.

"There's still a fight here James." She said pointing around. He looked, an attacker hadn't accosted him in a moment, so he'd forgotten them too. "A detachment of guard from Jadesport just arrived. Point out where Amina is. Make your way there. I'll meet you there with your weapons. But I have to get them."

"What? NO!" He replied, angrily. "She's hurt. BAD! We have to get to her, now." Why didn't she understand.

She pulled his arm down so that he had to look at her in the eyes. "We will. But the grabber clan is still trying to kill us. The guards have a healer. Or should anyways. But right now we have to fight. She would understand that."

"THEN GO FIGHT!" He yelled in her face. "I'm gonna go save her."

She relented. He was hurt, confused, tired, and scared. "Fine. Show me where she is. I'll meet you there in a moment."

James looked around for a moment, surprised to realize that he had no frame of reference for where he was. But he saw the only structure that could have been the cell. The only one made entirely of stone. He pointed.

She looked, noting the building in her mind. Then she raised her hands to each side. The chain and the dagger that James had just used rushed to her hands. She held them out, James took them.

"Go." She said, quietly. "Get to her."

Before James could try to convince the mage to join him, she'd begun flying off again. Black bolts flying at enemies once more. And just like that James was back into the battle, the momentary peace dissolving around him.

He began running toward the stone hut.

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Outside the camp, the battle had truly reached its crescendo. A force of twenty guards from Jadesport, cavalry all of them, had arrived. Only a few miles behind them were another unit, this one primarily foot soldiers and archers. Though they'd also brought several wagons and two of their garrison's best healers with them.

Kela had momentarily escaped the battle to give them a very brief briefing on the situation and telling them who to keep an eye open for and help. The Lieutenant of the unit was a man she knew and had worked with several times in the past. He was the only reason that the other guards didn't attack the almost unrecognizable, blood soaked, werewolf on sight.

After the short meeting Kela had sprung back into the trees, amazing the few guards who'd never seen a werewolf in battle before. The men who had, knew from her condition that the fighting ahead was fierce.

The cavalry charged, sounding war horns and raising war cries as they did. This threw the enemy into a panic. And made the more levelheaded ones fight even harder.

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James had gotten almost halfway to the stone hut. He'd had to slay several of the "grabber clan" members, as Veliry had called them, on the way. One of them had managed to sneak up on him while he was dispatching one, and he now bore a long, ragged, slash across his back.

It burned, and he couldn't decide whether it, or his shoulder injury, were the worse wound. He'd decide later.

He was slowing down now. He was tired. So tired. His vision was beginning to blur, going in and out of focus. His head ached from all the impacts it had sustained today. But he had to keep going.

Another of the weird snake eyed people, this one with startlingly pink skin, ran out from between two of the ramshackle buildings. It wasn't even trying to attack him, it was just running. James had no idea where

to. But it was one of the bastards responsible for all this. Before it even realized James was near, the chain lashed out from his left hand and clobbered it in the face, smashing it backwards to the ground. Before it could get up, James quickly knelt down and stabbed the dagger into its throat. Its eyes bulged in surprise as its blood poured out of the wound.

James stood up, leaned against the structure it had just come from behind. God he was tired.

He was about to start moving again when Veliry landed in front of him. In one hand she held his belt, with his holster and two magazines on it. He took it gladly, slinging it over his "good" shoulder. In her other hand she held something that made absolutely no sense to James.

"Thanks." He said as he stuck the dagger into the waist of his pants and gingerly drew the pistol with his right hand. "But why the fuck do you have an air impact wrench?"

She looked at him curiously. "A what?" She asked, now looking at the heavy item in her hand. "This is that 'rifle' thing you talked about, isn't it?"

James looked at her, eyebrows furrowed at the confusing question.

She held it up with both hands, wincing at the pain in her injured shoulder. "When you shot the prince, you told everyone that you also had something called a rifle." She pointed at the pistol. "You said it was a bigger, deadlier, version of that."

James held up the pistol and looked at it, then he looked at the power tool she was holding. He realized the nature of the misunderstanding. Then he doubled over laughing, pistol braced against the building, off hand holding his stomach.

"You." He laughed some more. "Thought that was a rifle?" More laughter. "That's a goddam power tool." He wheezed. "Right now, that's about as useful as a goddam stapler!" He bellowed laughter again.

Veliry was angry at the frustrating man. But she was also concerned. *He's practically delirious.* She thought. *We need to get him to one of the healers.* But she knew that nothing she did or said would pull him from this path. So, she resolved to go help end the battle, and rush the healers to him and to Amina.

James was already walking again, staggering a little as he did. He disabled the pistol's safety with his thumb, used his left hand to check that a round was chambered. Then he kept slowly walking towards the cell.

A fleeing member of the Grabber Clan rode past, completely oblivious of James.

Before he could get more than ten yards past, the pistol barked three times. Both rider and mount crashed to the ground. The rider with a hole

just off center in his back, and the beast with two holes. One in its ass, and one in its side.

I'm going to save her. He thought.

James staggered onward, and where his path intersected with members of this bastard clan, death was the only result. But not his.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (47/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rh8iix/wait_is_this_just_gate_46/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Alright I expect a good, dirty, bloody, fight from you two. Now knock gloves and LETSGETITON!

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Kela was close. She could smell James and Amina very strongly now. It was obvious that Steve could too. The problem was that their scents were overlayed by so many others. The grabbers, the Deep Orcs, Dwelfs, Goblins, and all the other members of this vile raider clan had scented this area so strongly that it was hard pin down the ones they needed.

But luckily, there were tracks.

The grabbers that the raiders used as mounts had very large, very distinctive tracks. Easy to follow as long as they were on the ground. Coupled with the tracks of the non-riders and the trail was somewhat easy to see. Additionally, Kela could smell smoke up ahead, someone had a camp.

She and the two drakes were moving at a jogging pace through the forest, occasionally pausing so that she and Steve could sniff at the surroundings. Her nose wasn't as sharp right now, she was roughly a third of the way through her transition back into human form, her snout was shorter and her sense of smell had lessened. But she was still better at tracking than Gixelle or Veliry, and likely a little better than Maxel.

It was as she and Steve had begun moving again, having just reacquired the scent, that Steve spasmed. His step halted suddenly and he let out an angered yelp, holding one of his legs up and turning to look at it. Kela and Gixelle stopped moving to see what had happened. Kela feared that perhaps the massive drake had been caught in a trap. But nothing was visibly wrong with the distressed beast.

She was about to move in closer and inspect the offending limb when Steve reeled to his side. He yelped again as if struck and began licking his

right side. But there was no arrow, no visible wound, nothing to indicate an attack.

The voice she heard from behind her was closer to a wolf's growl than anything Kela would have expected from the Clan Mother riding with them.

"They're hurting him." Gixelle said through gritted teeth. She was staring at Steve's side, where he'd been hit by the phantom impact, her eyes wide and furious. The right one was dark red with blood from an impact the night before. The elder warrior looked more like a beast than even Kela did right then. Her leather padding torn and cut in so many places that it was a miracle it stayed on. Her hair was matted with blood, both hers and the blood of the raiders she'd slain. Then she looked Kela in the eyes. "They're torturing him, and his bond with Steve is transferring it to him too." She said, pointing at Steve. And with that she kicked Maxel's sides and began riding in the direction they'd been going.

Kela knew she was right. She turned back to Steve. "Come on boy." She said to the beast. Then she looked up at Veliry. "Hold on tight." The battered mage nodded grimly and wrapped the reigns around her hands more tightly.

Kela and Steve began running again, forgoing the breaks to sniff for James and Amina.

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James struggled to get back up. The grey dwarf thing had hit him in the leg with his club. It wasn't broken, but it sure didn't feel good. He'd stumbled back into the ring of "people" surrounding the fight when he'd been hit there, and someone had pushed him down onto the ground. The grey dwarf had been more than happy to kick him in the ribs as a result.

He was winded again. He wouldn't be surprised if he had a cracked rib.

Whatever the little grey dwarf thing was, it was startlingly strong, and the one hit he'd managed to get in had felt like hitting a tree. It was about to kick him again when James rolled over and threw some of the dirt underneath him into its face. The crowd laughed as the little "person" flailed about blindly. James didn't give him a chance to recover, he scrambled to his feet and brought the shitty little club down on the attacker's head as hard as he could. There was a sickening crack as he did and the grey dwarf crumpled backwards limply.

James was just about to pounce on it and keep hitting, ensuring that it would stay down, when he felt something slam into his chest and bowl him over backwards. Some kind of hairy green thing with a long nose was scratching at him, trying to claw at his face with its long green fingers. James used the club to keep its gnashing teeth from biting him, and rolled kicking up and sending the thing flying over him.

It landed agilely on its feet like a cat, and charged at James again. But James had used the roll to get back on his feet. The little green thing

hadn't expected this, and as a result didn't expect James to kick it in the balls (assuming it had any) as if he'd been playing kickball. The impact was immense as James felt his boot smash into the creatures groin. The whole crowd gasped and then began laughing as the little monster lifted off the ground a bit and then fell down vomiting. James put it out of its misery with a single stomp, crushing its neck under his heel with a satisfying crunching. The crowd cheered.

Then a real opponent stepped into the ring. It was another of the massive orc things like the one that had James's medallion. This one wasn't as big, but he knew it didn't have to be. It had bits and pieces of leather armor, and it had a set of chains wrapped around its right hand and forearm.

James stood up, holding the small club like a sword before him, and faced this new challenger. He knew how strong these orc things were, the other one had held him off the ground and almost choked him out with a single hand. He was going to need a miracle to win this fight. He spit the dirt and blood out of his mouth and watched as the massive creature approached.

"I need to get the fuck out of here." He said to himself.

The creature began running towards him, chained fist raised to strike. James charged it right back, yelling as he closed the short distance.

\---

They were getting close now. Kela couldn't distinguish any of the different scents flooding through her nose. It was like she was swimming in the disgusting mix of sweat, feces, blood, musk, and rotten flesh scents that overwhelmed the area. But the smoke smell was stronger, and so were James and Amina's scents.

She could also hear some kind of loud commotion up ahead. It sounded like a crowd in an arena, shouts and whoops and laughter overlapping each other as people moved about. Through the trees she could see makeshift barricades of some kind up ahead.

She and Gixelle rushed forward with Maxel, letting Steve fall behind a bit. Over the last minute or so the drake had become increasingly agitated, the phantom attacks now occurring every few seconds. Poor Veliry was doing everything she could to stay on the drake, with its ill suited saddle and her injured shoulder.

They were only a few hundred yards away from the enemy camp when an arrow slammed into Gixelle's left shoulder. The Clan leader scarcely payed it any attention, simply leaning towards the hidden archer and guiding Maxel that way.

"Guards!" She yelled as she engaged the attacker. In a tree roughly twenty yards ahead of her a grabber sat in a tree, its rider rushing to nock a second arrow as the enraged drake rider charged him. "KEEP GOING! I'VE GOT THIS ONE!" She yelled to Kela and Veliry.

A horn blared somewhere to Kela's left. The enemy knew they were here.

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James heard the horn go off. He'd just barely managed to dodge one of the punches from the orc thing's chained fist, and really only barely. He hadn't been so lucky with some of the other punches. One of them had slammed into his stomach and put him on his knees as the orc thing had strutted around amping up the crowd and taunting him. Another had slammed into his shoulder and sent him spinning, yet another had slammed into his blocking club and shattered it.

He didn't know what the horn meant. But it had to mean something. Suddenly the cheering stopped and the crowd began to disperse, scattering every which way. Even his current opponent was looking around, likely wondering if he was supposed to keep beating on James.

James rose up behind the confused orc thing. He reached down and grabbed one of the longer pieces of splinters left behind from his shattered club. While the beast was still turned around James leaped up onto its back, wrapping his legs around its waist (albeit only barely) and wrapping his left hand over its shoulder. The beast began to flail, trying to reach back to get him off, but it was too late. James's right hand flashed forward over its shoulder, down and around its neck, and began stabbing it repeatedly in the throat. Thick bluish green blood began flowing over James's hands and down the front of the orc thing's chest, flying off onto the dirt every time James pulled his arm back to strike again. The beast kept trying to grab at him, and even succeeded in latching onto his left arm with a bone achingly strong grip. But the orc thing's strength quickly faded as its blood poured out of it. After a few moments, and several more stabs, the orc thing fell forward onto its knees, then slammed onto its face.

James rolled off to the side and lay on his back for a second, catching his breath. Then he rolled back onto his knees and moved down to the things right arm. He began unwinding the chain wrapped around it and took the crude weapon for himself. He was amazed that none of the other captors seemed to be paying attention to him.

At least he had thought so, until he heard a familiar voice yelling behind him.

"OY! ELFLING!" Shouted the rider that had his medallion. Several of the nearby "people" stopped their scrambling when they heard this and looked to see what was happening. The sight of the dead orc thing at his feet made them turn to face him, weapons in hand.

James stood up fully, chain wrapped around his right hand. He began swinging it. He'd seen chains used in movies before, but he wasn't foolish enough to think he could do anything like that. But it was better than no weapon at all. He turned to face the medallion wearer.

"I AINT NO FUCKIN' ELF!" He shouted. The rider jerked back in shock at the sudden exclamation. "YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT I AM MOTHERFUCKER!" James beckoned the rider with his left hand. "I'M FUCKIN ANGRY! COME SEE FOR YOURSELF!"

That was all the rider needed. He kicked his hideous mount into motion, and James turned and ran towards where he knew Amina's cell was.

One of the other enemies charged him with a short jagged sword and James slammed the heavy chain into the side of their face. When they fell he stomped on their arm, shattering it near the elbow, and reached down to grab the sword with his left hand as they began screaming. A single stab of the blade into their throat put a stop to it.

Then he really began fighting.

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Kela stole an idea from the raiders.

She'd spotted the horn blower sitting in one of the trees. He wasn't on a grabber, he was just perched up in some of the branches. She also saw that he had a sling and a bag full of what she assumed were the damnable clobber rounds that had caused them so much trouble the night before.

The horn blower fired the sling at her, but being aware of it ahead of time gave Kela more than enough time to dodge the projectile. She closed the distance quickly and in the last few yards leaped into the air, clearing the ten or so feet with ease and slamming shoulder first into the guard. His chest plate crunched beneath the impact and the guard spat blood on the side of Kela's face. She immediately grabbed him in both hands and launched him as hard as she could out of the tree. She didn't stop to see the result, she planted a foot on the side of tree and launched herself to the next tree on her path toward the riders that were now approaching.

There was another guard in a tree that she figured would take two more leaps. She took the first of them just in time to avoid an arrow. She landed in the next tree, fifteen feet or so above the ground, and above the attacking archer. This time when she leapt she did so with a higher arc, coming down at the archer from higher up. The Dwelf tried to aim up at her but it was too late for him.

She hit him like a furred comet, front hands extended and aimed at his chest. The claws parted the leather armor and pierced the chest of the Dwelf beneath. With a savage pull of each arm she ripped the archer into two ragged pieces, silencing the raider before he'd even had a chance to yell. She dropped the pieces and leaped at the riders that had begun to clamber up the tree beneath her, savaging the face of the grabber closest to her viciously, and biting one of the cheeks off of its disturbingly human-like face.

If they wanted to use their grabbers to stay in the trees and keep them off balance, then she could do the same.

Forty yards or so away Gixelle had already dispatched the archer. Maxel was high enough off the ground that Gixelle engaged the would be assassin on even ground. She'd simply rode forward, shield held up on her handless arm to block as she did. Once in range a single swing of her massive sword had cut both the arm, shoulder, and head from the attacker.

She didn't even have Maxel slow down for the attack. As a result she met the charging defenders first, and head on.

This shocked them. They were ragtag, having scrambled to their camp's defense without any organization. Additionally those who had been in the raid the night before bore the looks of the haunted. They looked as though they'd seen a ghost, and as far as they knew they had. The last thing they'd seen of Gixelle she'd been bloodied, handless, and mobbed by numerous other members of their raiding group. How was this massive, bloodied, warrior woman still alive? And how was she so strong?

Every swing of her sword broke blades, cracked shields, or severed head and limb from body. The shield blocked attacks, and stopped arrows as though it was self animated, scarcely requiring its wielder to even look in the direction of the incoming strikes before moving to intercept them. Gixelle was yelling a loud, hauntingly angry war cry with every blow. At one point a grabber jumped into one of the trees nearby to try and get its rider in range for a swing of their axe. A single swing of the gigantic sword flashed out and the grabber was cut in half at its middle. The rider's legs parted alongside it and both of them fell down to their deaths. The tree followed behind them, crushing several other enemies beneath its weight.

Gixelle didn't even spare them a second glance.

She wasn't the only source of murder in that part of the fight. Maxel was a blur of yellow and green death. Her head frequently snapped forward, latching onto grabbers, riders, and footmen alike. Her massive, fang-like, teeth punctured leather, metal armor, and most importantly flesh as easily as a needle would pierce cloth to mend a tear. Her clawed feet kicked and slashed at any who came near often sending attackers flying or slashing great wounds into them, and occasionally stomping fallen enemies into the ground with squelching crunches. On occasion she would spin rapidly, propelling her long, ridged, tail at incredible speed to whip enemies off of their feet or out of trees.

Together, as rider and drake, the two of them were a whirlwind of death and mayhem among the trees.

Kela and Gixelle were too busy fighting to notice when Steve and his temporary rider managed to join them. But it wasn't hard to figure out that they were there. The forest, and the enemies between Gixelle and Kela's melees erupted in black edged flames as Steve roared in anger at the attackers.

The trees began to light ablaze immediately, and the riders and footmen unfortunate enough to be caught in the flames became floundering torches.

They flailed and stumbled into each other and the burning trees as Steve's breath swept out in a wide arc to catch more of them. There would have been screaming if any of their lungs could still work. But the flames scorched the very air out of them.

After the initial breath attack was over Steve turned at a sudden pain in his shoulder. He almost ignored it, thinking it was another one of the invisible attackers, but when he looked he saw a spear sunk into the meat of his front left arm. His head snapped out and shattered the haft of the spear. Its rider made the mistake of looking at the now broken weapon.

Steve's head snapped back out again, grabbing the rider's mount by the back of its neck. He lifted it up to his full height, rider and all, nearly fifty feet off the ground. His jaw flexed and the flailing grabber went limp as its spine was crushed in the massive drake's jaws. Then Steve slammed the two enemies to the ground like a hammer, releasing them at the last second. Neither rider nor grabber moved.

Steve looked up to see another pair of riders approaching, one wielding another spear, and the other a large hammer. He was about to charge them and join the melee when dark blue, almost black, bolts of lightning struck the two riders, arcing back and forth between them and their mounts. Above, on Steve's back, Veliry sat, good hand still emitting the dark bolts of death. Her eyes glowed with a similar dark blue light. Steve was about to sniff her, curious at the small rider's capabilities. But suddenly she began flying up above him.

Where the mage flew, death rained for the members of the Grabber Clan.

Steve ran a different direction and began to add to the toll.

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James's fight wasn't easy.

He fought on the run, dodging and blocking strikes from the enemies all around him often only barely. Several of the attacks did manage to hit him, but he was moving fast enough that none of them managed to do more than light wounds, or temporarily staggering impacts. Behind him the medallion thief was gaining on him.

The thing it was on wasn't fast, but it was mobile. James tried to lose it by going between two of the camp structures, slashing the throat of one of the raiders as they emerged from one of them. The space between the structures was narrow and he thought it would buy him time.

But when he'd glanced back he'd been startled to see the massive beast simply clambering over the structures like some kind of nightmare spider. Luckily one structure was shoddily built enough that it collapsed and sent the thing sprawling for a moment, but a moment was all it was. James didn't even have time to enjoy the seconds of bought time, as a large spiked club swung out to strike at him.

He leaped back, one of the spikes on the club snagging on his shirt as he did. Too close for comfort. Before the attacker could bring the weapon back James lashed out with the chain and wrapped it around the attackers leg. A hard pull and the large snake eyed creature was sent sprawling. Before it could recover James slashed across its face with the short sword.

He jumped over the dying creature and continued moving. Just in time as one of the monster's massive hands slammed down on the ground where James had just been standing. James reeled at the impact as he felt the ground tremor from it. He had to avoid getting hit by one of those strikes.

And he had to get back to Amina. If he could get back to that hut he could hopefully use it as a a defensible position, assuming that the stone it was made of was strong enough to survive a hit like the one he'd just narrowly avoided.

James turned to see the progress of his pursuer. As he did one of the small, green, big nosed things like the one he'd killed in the ring got in his way and tripped him up. He went sprawling, and the short sword flew out of his hand as he hit the ground. He quickly rolled onto his back to get eyes on the pursuer, only to see the shadow of the beast above him. It was rearing back to slam both of its front arms down on him.

Goddamit. Was the only thing that James had time to think before it began moving down towards him. Its rider had a smug look on its face as it began to smile. James glared at him furiously.

Then the fire erupted in the forest outside of the camp. James could only see the very top of the wide arc of fiery devastation down past his feet. But even from this far away he could feel the intense heat of it. It felt like someone had thrown him in an pizza oven.

The monster poised to strike him stopped suddenly, turning to look at this new development, its rider joined it in looking towards the flames. In fact everyone in the camp had frozen in place, staring at the flames burning their compatriots out in the forest.

James should have moved out of the way, scrambled to safety. But he was transfixed on the flames. He knew those flames. He knew that black smoky edge that formed around them.

A smile began to form on his face.

He and the rider looked at each other at the same time. When the rider saw James's smile he yelled in rage.

James rolled to the side, and out of the way of the once again descending monster. He quickly snatched the short sword up and slashed it at the nearest of the beast's wrists. The blade bit deep and the creature recoiled from the unexpected strike. But when it did the blade held fast and was wrenched from James's grip.

But there was an opening.

James stepped on the still sprawled out green creature he'd tripped over and leaped up onto the beasts back, behind its confused rider. He wrapped the chain around the giant orc things neck. It dropped its war hammer and managed to just barely get the hand that had been holding it up between the chain and its neck.

James began pulling with all his strength.

In the rider's ear he yelled. "I'M GONNA FUCKIN KILL YOU!" And the two of them began struggling to end each other's lives.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (46/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rgivp5/wait_is_this_just_gate_45/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Gixelle is 100% a lvl 20 Barbarian.

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When the door opened James did what he could. He managed to take down the person with the snake like eyes, dodging their first grab and slamming them head first into the wall, being careful to avoid Amina's prone form as he did.

He had been on the verge of attacking the second intruder, a short pot bellied thing with a large nose and greyish skin. He'd been about to kick a field goal with that one's head when a long hairy arm had slammed into his abdomen and sent him flying into the wall that snake eyes had hit.

The blow itself knocked the wind out of his chest. The impact with the wall did too, but it also rang his bell. He felt warm fluid on the back of his head. He'd be lucky if he wasn't concussed.

He didn't get a chance to hit the ground. The same arm that had slammed him into the wall whipped over and grabbed him by the hair, lifting him off the ground and towards the door. James struggled feebly at the hand, noting that it only had three fingers. But he was exhausted, he was sore, and he had just been battered, so the effort was useless. The three fingered hand was like a vice grip on his hair, the fingers felt as though they were made of stone.

The beast dragged him out of the little prison cell and into the light of day.

Before, James's situation had been bad. Then he'd learned of Amina's condition and it had become dire. He had grown quite certain that he wouldn't be able to keep his promise to get her out of here safely.

Now as he looked at their captors for the first time, he began to know true hopelessness.

The two first intruders had just been people, of a sort. He didn't know what species they were, or even if they were sentient, since he couldn't understand them. But they'd at least been some kind of people.

The thing that had hit him, and was now lifting him several feet of the ground by his hair, wasn't a person. It was one of the things that the new arrivals had ridden into the area. He knew this because there was a large dark purple skinned figure riding atop it.

What ever it was, it looked like it could be Kraug's cousin. Its build was nearly identical. But where Kraugs skin was a dark olive green, this one's skin was a dark, almost black skin, that faded to a sort of blue around its eyes and mouth. It also had long scraggly brown hair all over its head, face, and running down its shoulders and arms. Its eyes were a bright, almost neon, green and the pupils were sideways like a goats.

That wasn't all though. The..... thing, it was riding, was the first thing James had seen in this world that truly registered in his mind as a monster. The limb that was holding James up was nearly five feet long, had to be nearly three feet wide, and ended in three massive fingers. And they were fingers, James could see looking at the other legs that they were similar to the kinds of fingers an ape would have, just longer. Its body was like a cross between a boar and a hyena, but much larger than either of them.

Its face was terrifying. Not because it looked like any kind of animal or mythical beast. But rather, because it didn't. Its face could have been a person's. Had it not been for the odd orange coloration and large fangs hanging from its upper jaw James could have easily mistaken it for the face of a sentient being that could be seen walking about in the capital. But there was a very obvious stupidity in that face. It might have been the face of a person, but its expression belied the face of a simpleton, and an angry one at that.

If that had been all, just the one orc-like man and his abominable mount, James might have held out hope of escape. But it wasn't just the one. There had to be at least thirty of the terrible creatures, and nearly as many "people" riding them. Not just orc-like people like the one before him, but other species of people. More of the grey dwarf things, more of the snake eyed things, and many others beside. All armed, most of them armored to some extent. One of them to his left was wearing a helmet that looked familiar to James, it looked like a wolfs head.

The purple orc-thing aimed his weapon at James, it was a large crude looking war-hammer, with a massive spike on its back side. And when it spoke, James understood it. When he looked he saw his green medallion

hanging from its neck, the leather strap straining to fit around the creatures massive neck.

"AH! He is awake then." It said before laughing. "Bring him here girl."

When it said this the monster curled its arm inward, bringing James up face to face with its rider. The stench of the beast, and the smell of its rider's breath made him want to gag. It stank of rancid meat, sweat, beastly musk, and blood.

James stared the monstrous rider in its eyes, faking stoicism. Its green eyes stared into his, terrifying in their alien shape.

"What do you want with us!?" James asked. Gritting his teeth at the pain in his scalp, and everywhere else for that matter. "Why did you do this?"

"Lookit that!" The thing said to its compatriots, laughing along with them. "The little elfling speaks! And it thinks it can ask questions of me!" It bellowed laughter again. The beast holding James didn't so much as move, even as James struggled against it.

"What do you want!" James repeated.

Suddenly the beast released James. He fell for just a moment, but was quickly snatched out of the air by the rider's off hand. It held him up by his throat, crushing the air out him easily as it drew him to within inches of its face. James's vision began to darken around the edges as his fingers scrambled to pry the massive hand off of his throat.

"What do I want?" It asked, spittle hitting James's face. "I want money for your skin little elfling. Or booze, or weapons, or whatever else da slavers will give me for ya." It pulled him to the side and it spoke directly into his ear. James's vision was getting darker. "And it better be a lot, for how many of my boys your little girly friends and your lizards done killed before we nabbed ya."

James was about to cross that dark grey barrier into unconsciousness when suddenly the hand released him. Or, more accurately, threw him. He regained his full consciousness just in time to slam into the ground on his back, and found himself winded and with his head ringing again.

"IF HE CAN FIGHT AND ASK STUPID QUESTIONS, THAN HE CAN PLAY SOME GAMES AND ENTERTAIN US UNTIL WE'RE READY TO MOVE!" The massive orc-thing yelled. When it did all the other "people" cheered and began yelling gibberish taunts.

James was quickly picked up and put on his feet. Something was thrust into his hand, and when he looked down he saw that it was some kind of simple club. It looked like a baseball bat that someone had carved by hand, with very little skill. He was going to ask what they expected him to do. But when he did he had to roll out of the way under another club that was being swung at his face.

He was massively outnumbered, he was in pain, he was out of breath from being battered and choked, he was scared, and he needed to get Amina out of here.

But James wasn't being given any time to think about any of that. He just began fighting for his life.

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A little over eight miles away, Kela was running again. She was curious as to how often James intended to make her run like this while they were traveling together. In his defense, she thought, this one wasn't even remotely his fault.

In fact, if anything, it might have been her fault. She'd seen the Grabber and its rider sitting in the tree near the camp, the large beast using its strong arms and dexterous hands to conceal them high up in a tree. She'd accidentally let the wolf take control for a minute, and instead of warning her traveling companions of the danger had locked into a staring challenge with the monstrous beast. It was a foolish mistake that shouldn't have happened. As a result she'd been stabbed numerous times, the drakes had been harassed and injured (only surviving because of Maxel's skill and speed), Veliry's mount had been killed and her travelling quarters lit aflame for a while, and Gixelle had lost a hand.

But worst of all, James and Amina had been taken.

James had been hit by a clobber round from one of the riders almost immediately, the sack of rocks and sand knocking him out before he'd even known anything was wrong. Amina had seen this and jumped to his defense. She was a skilled warrior, probably one of the best sword fighters in the land. But the raiding Grabber-Clan had caught them at their most vulnerable. They'd already set camp and removed their armor and gear. James and Gixelle had been getting ready to sit down and have more magic lessons with Veliry, and Amina had been working on warming up some dinner.

Only Kela had been fully armed, and only because she'd drawn first watch. What a mistake that had been.

Gixelle and Amina had fought their hardest despite being all but unarmed. Veliry had begun casting almost immediately, great gouts of flame and dark blue lightning arcing out to strike the attackers as she hovered in the air. At least until another clobber round had struck her in the stomach and broken her concentration. After that she'd plummeted to the ground and been knocked unconscious.

The fight didn't last long after that. Kela saw Amina get stabbed in the leg, and then as she'd turned to the attacker another enemy had rode up behind her and slammed a massive fist into the side of her face, knocking her out and sending her sprawling.

Gixelle showed the ambushers just what her muscular stature could do. Once she'd realized there was a fight the Clan mother had intercepted a

charging rider by the throat, ripping it from its saddle. Then she'd began using the Deep Orc as a make shift shield and club to bludgeon its own attacking mount with. The elder warrior had entered a frenzy and quickly charged at the nearest attacker with murderous intent. Each punch, each kick, and each improvised weapon strike had sent their targets flying, or broken limbs into mush. At least until a lucky strike from a rusty halberd had severed her left hand at the wrist.

As she'd seen that happen a spear had run Kela through, piercing her through the stomach and out the back. A vicious blow from her axe had lopped the arm of of the wielder, but as she'd tried to remove the spear a dagger had pierced her arm and caused her to drop her weapon. The enemies had surrounded her, and only the viciousness of her claws and teeth had stopped them from butchering her to pieces. Still they managed to maim her badly before they'd withdrawn.

The last thing she'd seen before passing out had been James's unconscious body being thrown over the shoulder of one of the riders. She'd reached for him, but quickly had to use the reaching arm to claw at the face of an attack Dwelf.

She'd woken up hours later, with the sun beginning to slowly creep over the horizon. Gixelle was standing over her, bloodied and half mad from anger. She'd slapped Kela awake. Kela didn't give herself time to completely heal, she'd only checked to make sure that all her limbs were still present, and that her guts hadn't been ripped out by the spear. Then she'd jumped up to her feet, pain surging through her mind from all of her injuries. She took stock of how badly they'd been hurt. Then they'd saddled up, Veliry had used spells to send messages to the nearest towns, and then they'd began tracking the raiders.

Now she was running again. This time though, she didn't have to follow her nose. To her left Steve was running, his neck puffing and compressing with each breath. He had James's scent in his nose, and he was following it better than she ever could, especially now that his muzzle was off.

Riding on his back, bruised and battered, was Veliry. She had her right arm in a sling, and she had bruises everywhere, but she was alive and in one piece, what was left of her carriage had been magically compressed and placed into one of Steve's saddle bags. Veliry looked like she was constantly on the verge of falling off, likely from the saddle not being made for someone so small, but also from her injuries. But the diminutive mage held firm and rode on.

To her right Gixelle rode on Maxel. The elder clan leader looked half mad, her eyes focused and unblinking, the right one had blood pooled in it. Her right hand gripped the handle of her massive sword, knuckles white. The left wrist had been wrapped in bandages and had James's shield strapped tightly to it. She rode without even using the reigns, her experience and bond with Maxel allowing the two of them to move in unison with no issue. She had forgone wearing her armor, and simply wore the tattered and bloody remnants of the leather padding she'd been wearing when they'd been attacked. Kela could practically smell the fury oozing off of the woman. She was glad they were on the same side.

The three of them, and the two drakes continued on, and rode to war. They'd get James and Amina back, and slaughter the Grabber-Clan, or die trying.

[\[Next\]](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/ri0qpm/wait_is_this_just_gate_47/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (45/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rfp76y/wait_is_this_just_gate_44/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: Frying pan. Meet Fire.

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James didn't know how long he lay there struggling. It felt like hours, and yet at the same time, it didn't feel like long enough. It was still night time, he knew that much at least.

The rock was as inefficient at its job as he'd known it would be. He'd sawed at the restraints until his fingers had started hurting and still he could barely feel any difference in the ropes. Still, he pressed on, sawing through the pain as the time ticked by.

His attempt at wind magic wasn't going any better. His right hand had cramped several times from the intricate finger movements needed for the simple spell. And even with all that focus, since there wasn't much else to focus on, had produced not even a puff in the dust beneath his back. But he kept trying. What else was there to do?

He also kept an ear open for the people outside. Before he had only heard two of them. But as time had gone on he had heard at least two others join them and leave, their gibberish speaking having different tones than the others. At one point he'd had to roll back over and play dead as he heard one coming closer. He'd heard shuffling somewhere below him, relatively speaking, and after a moment had heard them grunt, yell something at the others, and then shuffle off. He'd waited for a minute to make sure they weren't still there, then he'd gotten back to work.

The other person in the room, at least he thought it was some kind of room, hadn't moved. Their breathing had continued at a slow, steady, and occasionally rasping pace. They'd even moaned a few times, long and low. But they weren't snoring. James had a bad feeling that whoever they were, they'd been hurt worse than he had.

After what had felt like hours the light in the "room" finally changed. It wasn't much, and James could only barely see it through the bag on his head. But he could tell that the sun was coming up. His hands both ached, and he was fairly certain that one of the fingers on his left hand was

beginning to bleed. It probably had a blister that he'd worn through with the small rock.

It was as the light began to change that something worrying happened outside.

Where before James had only been able to hear maybe four or five of his captors moving around and talking to each other. As the sun came up he heard a great commotion outside the "room". He hadn't been in this world for very long, but his time riding with the clan to the hot springs had taught him what the sound of approaching riders was like.

That was what he heard outside.

Luckily, while the ground did rumble with their approach, it didn't reverberate quite as deep as when the clan members had been riding. He couldn't be sure, but he had to guess that this meant the riders outside WEREN'T on anything so large as drakes were.

That was a good sign.

The snarling and odd low barks he heard accompanying the riders, was not. Because that meant that whatever these newcomers were riding, they weren't horses.

The other thing that made James pay more attention was the fact that one of these new arrivals was talking. This wouldn't have been important, except for the fact that James could understand them.

That's bad. James thought. *Either that guy is from Earth, which I doubt. Or he has my medallion. Either way, it's a problem.*

As these newcomers began yelling and giving each other unintelligible commands and calls, James redoubled his efforts with both hands. But he also listened closely, taking great care to focus on the one he could actually understand.

"Get em fed and watered you lot! We gotta ride for the coast first thing!" The stranger shouted. The others spoke for a bit and then they began talking again. "Cause the bleedin' ship aint gonna stick 'round forever! Dem slavers is gonna want the funny lookin' one, and they can take us to Estguva so we can take dat pretty one to that blonde smilin' man. His boss'll pay us big time for the princess! If she survives that long." They said more, but James didn't hear any of it.

He froze. They had Amina?

Then the realization hit him. He looked toward where the other person was still lying, even though the bag prevented him from seeing them. He was about to roll over to see if he could reach them with his hands. Then he remembered what he'd seen in movies before and scolded himself for not thinking of it sooner.

His shoulders screamed from the sudden contortion, and his ankles felt like they were on the verge of spraining themselves from how they were restrained, but he had to get his hands in front of him. He reached back and down as far as his hands could go, and scrunched his legs up into his chest. Then after a moment of pushing through the pain, he managed to get his butt below the ropes tying his arms. He lay that way for a second, holding in the groans of pain that wanted to escape his mouth. Then he pulled his legs through the small space, folding himself almost in half to do so.

He reached up and pulled at the bag for a second before remembering that it had to have been tied in order to stay on through all his struggling. He felt around his neck for a moment and then felt the knot on the side of the bag. It took a bit of work, but eventually he got the knot undone and pulled the bag from his head.

The first thing he noticed was that it wasn't morning. He looked up through the hole in the ceiling of what was definitely some kind of small cave and saw that it was probably closer to mid day. But that was a problem for later. The cave or hovel was small and sure enough the walls were made of some kind of solid stone. There was a wooden door with a small hole near the top of it. The whole thing reminded him vaguely of an old timey out house.

Then he turned to the other captive and his heart sank.

He recognized the raven black hair that lay over her face. But it was matted with blood and dirt and other bits of nature. He wormed his way over to her and began to check her to see how badly they'd hurt her.

It wasn't good.

Amina hadn't moved for good reason. The left side of her face was swollen, the eye on that side almost shut from the swelling. Her jaw was puffy and looked like it was hanging at an odd angle. He touched it gently, and sure enough he could tell it was broken. Her right eye fluttered slightly when his hand touched it, and she began to groan.

He quickly placed his mouth near her opposite ear, the one that wasn't surrounded by swollen flesh, and shushed her.

"Sssshhhh. Amina, it's me." He said, trying to quiet her before someone heard her. "I'm sorry. I know that hurt. But it's me James." He said, forgetting that without the medallion she wouldn't be able to understand him. "It's James. I'm here. You're hurt pretty badly, but I'm here. Can you hear me?"

It was only as he asked this that he realized that she wouldn't have understood a thing he'd said. He scolded himself again. What had happened? Why would they do this to them? WHO had done this to them?

A million questions ran through his head as his anger began to grow.

One problem. Just focus on one problem at a time. He thought. *First, hands and feet. Then Amina. Then escape.*

He looked down at his hands. The restraints started at his wrists and went about halfway to his elbows. The knot was about halfway up..... and it was on the bottom of his arms.

Great. He thought. *Not gonna be able to reach that with my teeth. My dentist is gonna hate this. Oh wait, he's in another universe. Suck it Major Echevarria, this is what you get for taking my wisdom teeth even though they were totally healthy.*

James put one of the pieces of rope nearest to his wrists into his mouth and began sawing his teeth back and forth with as much pressure as he could manage.

The rope tasted awful. Like old hair, sweat, dirt, and other flavors he didn't even want to try to categorize. It was also tough, much tougher than he'd hoped. But after a minute of chewing on it he began to feel bits of it fraying in his mouth. He continued chewing until his jaw began to cramp, then he spat the bits of rope out, stretched his jaw, and went back to work. *Pain later, work now.* Was the mantra that he repeated as he did.

After nearly an hour the rope finally got narrow enough that James felt like he could break it. He let it go with his mouth, braced his hands together like he was praying and pressed them into each other as hard as he could. He used the restraints themselves as a leverage point, focusing as much pressure as he could on the part where he'd chewed the rope thin. But his first attempt didn't work, the rope frayed a little more but it wouldn't break.

"Come on." He said through gritted teeth as he strained. He put the rope back in his mouth and began chewing again.

As he did he looked at Amina as she lay next to him. He knew she had a broken jaw, and based on the swelling he wouldn't be surprised if she was heavily concussed. But the captor had talked about how she might not survive the trip, and if that was all she had she'd have at least moved a bit by now. How badly was she really hurt? What could he do if she was that bad off?

He continued chewing. After a few more minutes he let go again and braced his hands again.

He focused on Amina, lying there hurt and about to be sold to some "Smiling man". He strained against the rope even harder.

"Come on." He said again. The muscles in his arms, and his shoulders especially strained against the rope, his hands were white with the pressure he was putting on them. "COME ON!" He hissed at the stubborn rope.

He was about to give up and start chewing again when he heard a light tearing noise, then there was a small pop and suddenly the ropes felt looser. He looked down and the part he'd chewed was now severed.

"Fuck yes." He said quietly as he quickly began using his hands to unravel the ropes and free himself. Once his hands were free he stretched his arms and flexed his hands, then he rubbed his jaw for a minute and began working on the leg restraints. Having use of his hands made untying the knot (also on the back of his legs just like the arm restraints had been) much easier.

As soon as he was free he rushed over to Amina to see how badly she was hurt. First he placed his lips near her good ear again.

"Amina. It's James again. I know you can't understand me, but I have to warn you." He said. He was practically shaking with a combination of fear, exhaustion, and rage. "I'm gonna see how badly they hurt you. I'm gonna have to touch you, it's probably gonna hurt." He felt a tear roll down his cheek. "But I'm gonna get us out of here. I promise. I'm sorry about what has to happen right now."

James placed his left hand under her head, with his right hand he lightly pressed on the opposite side and felt her skull. No movement, just swelling on the left side of her face, but the skull seemed fine. Then he gently placed his hand on her jaw, feeling how badly it was broken. She groaned again, but James quickly placed a finger on her lips, shushing her as he did. Her upper lip was split as if she'd been punched in the face, and she probably had he thought.

"I know. I'm so sorry." He said as she quieted again. "But I have to figure out what's wrong with you."

He moved his hands down to her neck, careful not to twist or lift anything. His right hand felt the back of the neck to check her spine, luckily that all seemed to be in line, nothing sticking out or grinding. His left hand checked her pulse and he focused his eyes on her throat. The pulse was weak, but steady, and her throat didn't show any signs of swelling or being badly aligned, though there was bruising in the shape of a three fingered hand.

"Sorry hon." He said, preparing himself for his first ever real trauma assessment. "But I've gotta check the rest of you too. Hope you understand once we get out of this." James braced himself and then moved down to her torso.

He'd done thousands of mock trauma assessments. The army had drilled them as part of being BLS certified. Every soldier had to do it at least once a year. On top of that, he'd done plenty during his nursing classes. But this was the first time he'd ever had to do one on someone that had actually been injured, and badly. It didn't help that it was someone he cared about. But he pushed that aside in his brain, and went to work.

By the time he was done, James knew why she hadn't moved, and why her breathing was so labored.

He'd found that her right shoulder was dislocated. On top of that her ribs were a mess. Obviously he didn't have an X-ray to make sure, but he counted at least four broken ribs with another two being questionable, and those were just the ones he could feel. As if that wasn't enough, she'd suffered numerous lacerations. None of them were deep enough to truly threaten her life, but they were an infection risk. The cherry on top of everything was a stab wound that went clean through her left calf muscle, it was about two inches wide and angled downward, someone had stabbed her in the leg. It was wrapped with nothing but a piece of dirty cloth, James took this off and replaced it with a piece of his pant leg that he ripped off. It wasn't much, but it was something.

This was bad. After examining her he understood what the person outside had been talking about. He was honestly amazed she had even survived this long, much less surviving through some kind of naval voyage to somewhere else. He needed to get her out of here and to a healer. And he wasn't even sure if he'd be capable of moving her. What could he do?

James pressed his head into the ground next to her, trying to think. It was as he was doing this that he heard something moving towards the door. He'd been so wrapped up in checking on Amina that he'd completely forgotten to keep his ears open for their captors. As he listened he heard multiple people approaching the door. He jumped off of her and was about to try to put the bag back on his head and play dead again.

But when he turned and looked, there was already a face in the small window. It had dark greenish brown skin with scars everywhere, the skin on its face glistened as if it was wet with sweat. Its eyes were bright crimson red with pupils like a snakes. And it was staring right at him, and it was smiling.

It yelled something in that gibberish that James couldn't understand. He heard the others talking back, and then heard the person that he could understand.

"HE'S UP!?! BRING HIM OUT HERE. LET'S SEE WHAT HE'S WORTH!"

James froze as he heard something on the other side of the door clattering. They were coming in.

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James couldn't hear it. He was too focused on the creatures about to enter the room. The other captors didn't hear it either. They were being too rowdy in their celebration of a very successful raid.

But in the distance there was a loud, angry roar of pure rage. Another followed right behind it. And then a howl joined the chorus.

The three vocalists were moving, and they were following a pair of scents.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (44/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/rcp1jy/wait_is_this_just_gate_43/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: As anyone who's ever played D&D can tell you, long distance trips often go by quicker than combat encounters. For the sake of avoiding OVERWRITING i've decided to hold to that....somwhat. But trouble always rises when your PC isn't actually paying attention. Poor James.

Anyways, enjoy the beginning of arc 2 of the WITJG? series.

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For the fourth time in only a little over a month, James woke up somewhere he wasn't supposed to.

The first thing that he noticed upon waking was that he couldn't see. It took a second to figure out that he had a sack over his head. The second, was that he was in pain. His whole body felt like it had been used as a punching bag, and his shoulders felt like he'd done hundreds of pull-ups in a row. And the third and final thing worth noting, was that his hands and feet were tied, with his hands behind his back.

How had he gotten here? His head was throbbing. He was fairly certain that someone had hit it with something, though he couldn't remember what. The last thing he remembered was setting up camp on night four of their journey north. Kela had stiffened suddenly, fur raised running down her back as she'd stared into the woods nearby. He'd been about to ask her what was going on. Then he'd woken up here.

What had happened? He tried to remember how he'd gotten here.

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The first four days of the trip had been amazing. It had felt like the cross country trips his family had always wanted to go on, but had never had the time or money to actually make happen.

Mornings had been spent training his swordsmanship with Kela, Amina, and Gixelle. They taught him the basics and had him running drills with his sword and shield. It reminded him of combatives and it felt good to be doing training again, even if it was exhausting. Usually it would end with a sparring match with any of the three of them, testing whatever they'd taught him that day.

After breakfast they'd break down camp and begin riding. James and Gixelle would usually hang back for an hour or so before taking off. During that time James would practice different commands with Steve. Steve continued to prove how smart he was, usually only requiring a handful of attempts before learning them. By day three James had even been able to take Steve's muzzle off, though it still had to go back on at night and when they were in the villages they passed through. After they were done training Steve, and teaching James different ways to ride him, they would run their two drakes hard to catch up with the rest of the group. This helped exercise the two monsters, and also help James learn to ride at speed. Just like before, riding Steve seemed to come naturally to James, and helped relax him.

After that they would ride through the day. If they came across a village they would usually stop for a bit to grab lunch or an early dinner. The people were always friendly, and seemed to recognize everyone except James and Veliry. It wasn't uncommon for people to bring gifts for Amina or Gixelle, trying to gain favor with the King or the Clan. The two of them would typically decline these gifts and insist that the people keep them, though Gixelle was apt to accept offers of drink. Kela meanwhile, would usually check with the town guards to get a report on the town's status, and learn of any potential dangers ahead. They always reminded James of fellow lower enlisted who'd suddenly been surprised by an unexpected inspection from the first sergeant, eager to please but scared to be found as A'd up.

They'd ride until the sun had already been down for a few hours, then they would set up camp. They'd pitch tents and start a fire, though apparently Veliry's small carriage was all she needed. At James's questioning she'd allowed him to step into it. From outside it seemed barely large enough to fit a single person sitting down. But once he'd stepped inside, James had been reminded of Dr. Who, as the inside of it was practically a house in its own right. In fact it reminded James of an old school train sleeper car. The inside had been turned into a combination living area and mage's laboratory.

Once camp was set, James would spend an hour or so teaching the princess how to aim and fire a pistol. They weren't shooting them yet, he had told her about the ammo and how scarce it was. But he'd promised that once he thought she was ready he'd let her fire the rubber rounds first and then eventually the live rounds. He had a feeling that once she'd finished learning she'd make a fine shot, not surprising for someone who was already a warrior, but he wouldn't know until she'd actually fired. For now though, they settled for a little dummy round laser sight that would shine a red light on whatever it was aimed at any time it was hit by the pistols firing pin.

After his lessons with Amina, James would settle in with Gixelle and learn magic from Veliry. For Gixelle it was pretty basic stuff. She already knew how to cast magic, she just needed help with energy management. James on the other hand knew nothing about magic. With him Veliry was basically teaching a first year student. Much to James's chagrin, she acted like it too. He felt like he was being forced to sit

through a children's class. But he couldn't complain too much. He was learning magic after all.

She started the first class discussing how energy is channeled for magical casting. All casters drew their magical energy from their surroundings, as well as any source unique to them. For simpler spells that energy could be found just from the air around a person, since the world they were on was suffused with magic it could effectively be drawn from nothing.

She demonstrated by having Gixelle cast a simple illumination spell on a fork. The area around the fork and Gixelle's hand had darkened for about three seconds, then the fork had lit up like a light-bulb. It cast a weak light around it that only extended a few feet. But it was still more than James could do. Veliry took a different fork and barely touched it with her pointer finger for split second. The resulting light had left spots on James's vision for minutes afterwards, and Veliry had quickly had to cancel the spell to prevent them from being blinded. That was how she'd demonstrated the difference between skill levels when it came to casting.

Afterwords she'd had James focus on the different energies he could feel around him. The wind, the ground beneath him, the moonlight, even his own breathing and heartbeat were all sources of latent energy that could be drawn upon if needed. She'd had him sitting, eyes closed, just feeling these energies and seeing if he could sense them shifting around him. It had all felt very new age, healing crystal, hippie dippy to James. he'd practically fallen asleep until she'd zapped him with a very weak lightning bolt to wake him up.

The next day she'd started James on learning basic air control magic. It was considered the easiest magic to summon energy for, seeing as the energy it relied upon was literally always surrounding you. She'd had him focus on directing air into a single direction, demonstrated by her keeping a piece of parchment floating and dancing above her hand. She told him what to focus on and how to direct it in his mind and in his body. Then she'd handed him the parchment and told him to simply get it to bend over with wind.

James had gotten frustrated enough that he'd had a bit of a meltdown on day three, yelling at the paper and the wind and himself. He'd asked Veliry if wind magic was really worth learning if all it could do was move paper. She'd countered this, admittedly childish, line of questioning by simply swinging her arm at a nearby tree. James had watched in amazement as an invisible line had been cut in the tree's canopy, parting leaves like a knife and ultimately severing an entire branch. He'd shut up after that and gotten back to focusing.

He'd spent hours trying to focus on bending the piece of parchment to no avail though. And as day four had rolled around he'd begun to feel like a failure. To her credit though, Veliry wasn't mad with him. She assured him that it was common for adults to struggle with learning magic. Typically people who wanted to be casters would begin learning as young children, when their minds were easiest to mold to the concepts. Adults on the other hand had a difficult time learning such odd concepts as

harnessing the energy of the wind and changing it in their minds. She also admitted that she had no idea whether he even could do magic, being from another world. That hadn't made him feel any better.

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It was these last memories that James focused on as he snapped back to his present situation.

It was a good thing he'd snapped back too. Now that he was back out of his memories he could hear people speaking, at least two of them. Unfortunately though, they were speaking gibberish. He wondered about this for a moment before realizing that, whoever they were, they'd taken his medallion. It made sense, he was tied and had a bag over his head, why wouldn't they have robbed him too. The giant green medallion had probably looked like a sweet haul for whoever his captors were.

Whoever they were he thought they must have been about ten yards away. One of them was very agitated as he spoke in their gibberish. He was yelling and James thought he could hear them occasionally striking the other one. They were both men, or at least their voices were deep and gruff enough to be men. He couldn't exactly see them to be sure.

In fact, he was startled to find that he couldn't see anything.

He'd never been abducted quite like this before so he couldn't be sure. But he'd seen movies where characters had had bags put over their heads, they'd always been able to at least see lights and vague shapes.

James couldn't see any of that. He was about to start panicking. Had they blinded him somehow? This was a world of magic, had they used a spell to take his sight? Maybe they'd poisoned him, or put something in his eyes. God, was he going to be blind? Why couldn't he see anything? He couldn't even see the fibers of the bag, what was happening?

Then James heard something unexpected that calmed him almost immediately. It was the hoot of an owl.

James rolled over slowly onto his back, trying to point himself toward the sound. His back and shoulders ached as he rested on them. But as he rolled over he saw, faintly but it was still reassuring, the glow of the moon coming through a hole above him. He realized that he was inside some kind of structure of some sort, but most importantly he could see. He'd panicked and mistaken the darkness of nighttime for blindness. He felt like an idiot.

He could still hear the two people arguing outside. Apparently they hadn't heard him moving, or beginning to panic. That was good. He continued rolling slowly, hurting the whole way, to try and find a wall, or if he was really lucky, some kind of tool. He had to get his hands untied.

It was as he was rolling his second time, now facing the way he'd originally been facing, that James felt something unexpected. He'd been

rolling back onto his back again when his hand had happened upon something warm and soft that was wrapped in cloth. After a moment of, painfully, moving his arms up and down he'd realized what it was.

James was not alone in his confinement.

He wasn't sure if it was another prisoner like him, or if it was one of his captors. But James quickly rolled the other way, back to his original position. He listened for a moment, focusing on his immediate surroundings and ignoring the two people outside arguing. After a moment he heard breathing. It sounded labored, like the person was struggling with each breath.

He kept listening for several long seconds. But after a while he knew that this was the only other person in the structure with him. If there was anyone else, they were either dead, or they didn't require breath. He wasn't sure which one he preferred.

James rolled the other way, away from the potential captor, and began trying to find a wall again. This time as he rolled he noticed that the ground wasn't even in this other direction. It had bumps and rocks, and small cracks in its hard stone floor. He grabbed at some of these rocks, hoping for one that was sharp enough to cut the ropes on his wrists. But none of them felt like they had a sharp enough edge to do the trick. Still, he held on to one of the more angular ones. It would take a while for it to cut anything, but he had a feeling that he had time to kill. He rolled again, and finally found a wall.

When he did, he realized that he was in some sort of cave, or perhaps some oddly built stone building. The wall curved upwards sharply, and as he felt around with his hands and feet he felt no edges, or creases. He determined that it couldn't be any kind of masonry. It was either solid, shaped stone, or it was some kind of molded and hardened stone-like structure. Either way there were no edges to cut his ropes with, and nothing he could grab onto. At least not without making more noise.

As James discovered this he knew that his escape was going to be harder than even he'd expected. So he got to work. He'd worry about the other person once he'd gotten himself loose.

With his left hand he took the small, not very sharp, rock and began sawing at his restraints. With his right hand he began trying to make the air move again. He kept his doubts about this to himself. He had to try something, and if he could get the wind magic to work he might be able to use that cutting technique that Veliry had shown him.

But first, he just needed to make any kind of wind magic work. So he kept trying to make little puffs of air with his right hand, and sawed at the ropes with the left. One way or another, he would free himself and find out what happened.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (43/?)

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Writer's Note: Congrats everyone. We've officially reached the end of the beginning of the current arc. I probably won't post anything tomorrow, I've still got some brainstorming to do about the trip, plus I have to flesh out the Vanishing Blight a bit more before we get to the big reveal. This is a light chapter. We'll get back into the groove next week. Glad y'all have enjoyed it so far, and I look forward to writing more.

As always, enjoy.

\~

The next morning, just before dawn, James went down and saddled Steve.

He had his assault pack in his hand, loaded with his army uniforms and all his spare gear, and wrapped inside his IOTBS, which had his helmet strapped to it. He was also wearing the armor that Kraug had given him and had his sword on his hip and riding shield on his back. In his other hand was his saddle bags, they'd been loaded some of his clothes from this world, the translation book, some rations, and other items that he and Kela had gotten on their shopping trip. He also had the black polymer suitcase from the night before. It had been delivered by the princess just before he'd gone to bed. In it he had his phone's charging panel and a few other things that he didn't want getting wet or jostled too much.

When he got to the stables he saw Gixelle already preparing Maxel. She waved to him as he approached. He dropped his gear off near Steve's pen just in time for Veliry to emerge from one of the stable doors.

Veliry was leading what James could only describe as some kind of large bird. It looked like the bastard offspring of an ostrich and a flamingo, and was roughly ten feet tall when it stood up. But sitting on its back was a small saddle, clearly made for the diminutive mage, and it was pulling what had to be the world's smallest carriage.

She must've seen the confused look on James's face.

"It's a Rugaran. Her name's Inyria." She said.

James just stood staring at the odd creature before he answered. "That's not a real sentence that you just said." And then he went back about his business. It was too early for such nonsense.

Veliry opened her mouth in shock at the accusation, huffed, and then continued with her preparation once she saw that he wasn't going to continue with the conversation.

As James saddled Steve, once again struggling to get the drake to accept the equipment, he heard a small commotion outside of Steve's pen. Luckily the process went quicker this time. Once the main part of the saddle, the Wobbamong belly, was cinched in place the large drake submitted to his inevitable fate and remained still.

When James rode Steve out of the pen's doors he found what the commotion was. Nearby Kela and Amina stood beside two griffins, saddled and armored. That wasn't the cause of the commotion though. Mela and Tilo were.

The two were-pups were running around in their typical hyper-speed that James had become used to from them. They were bouncing between pestering their mother, pestering the princess (Aunt Mina), pestering the two griffins, pestering Gixelle (who was loving it), and attempting to pester Inyria (who was not loving it).

The only thing that stopped the frantic, furry, little pin-balls was when James and Steve walked out.

When the two pups saw James atop Steve's back they immediately froze, eyes widening, as they realized that they knew the armored man atop the forty foot tall lizard monster. They were about to run over and begin harassing the two when their two parents grabbed their shoulders and held them locked in place. Kela grabbed Mela, and Jurl grabbed Tilo, preventing the two of them from approaching.

"Awwww, mooooooom!" Mela complained. "It's James, and he's riding a HUUUUGE drake! Can I go pet him?!"

Kela looked her daughter in the eyes sternly. "Not yet. That's Steve. He hasn't been fully trained yet." Then she looked at Tilo. "That goes for you too. We can't upset him too much. He might hurt you if he gets startled or confused." Mela didn't seem to hear the words, her excitement overwhelming her willingness to listen to reason. But Tilo took the words to heart, scrambling to hide behind his father's legs.

James used the distraction to slide down Steve's side,holding his lead in hand as he did. He still couldn't help but be amazed at how naturally interacting with Steve seemed to be to him. He tied the drake's lead to a peg on the outside of the pen and then walked towards the the group. When he did Mela broke free from her mother's grasp and ran up to tackle him, but he was ready this time and simply threw her over his shoulder and carried her the rest of the way.

"Hey guys." He said as he approached. "I seem to have picked up some extra luggage on the way over." At this he threw Mela at her mother, who caught her easily.

"Oh, that reminds me." Kela said as she turned to Gixelle and Veliry. "Can you two get his saddle bags ready?" Gixelle nodded, and Veliry joined her as they walked toward James's gear.

"My bags are already ready." He said, confused at Kela's request.

"Well yes. They're packed. But look at them." She said, pointing at the luggage in question. "They're practically bursting, and I'm guessing mainly with clothes."

"Well, yeah...." He replied, confused. "We're gonna be gone for at least two weeks. You always pack extra for that kinda trip, especially socks." The last part of his statement caused looks of confusion in the others.

"Right." Kela said after a moment. "Anyways. This should make your load a bit easier to carry." She pointed back at the luggage.

James watched as Veliry pulled two small scrolls from one of the pockets on her robes. She unraveled one, pulling a small piece of parchment from it as she did. She handed the smaller piece to Gixelle, who opened one of the saddle bags, reached into it past his belongings, and pressed the piece to the bottom of the bag. The two of them spoke some words that James couldn't understand, even with the medallion hanging from his neck. Their arms glowed a faint pink shade for a few seconds as they recited the enchantment.

James watched, eyes wide, as the bag seemed to grow empty before his very eyes. The once bulging sides of the bag seemed to sink in, and Gixelle seemed to almost fall over for a second before catching herself. Then James realized what had happened, and also remembered the day before when Gixelle had seemed to reach much further into her saddle bag than she should have been capable of.

"Holy crap." He said. "They're bags of holding." A smile spread across his face. "They're actual bags of holding." Beside him Amina chuckled a little bit at his childish wonder, hiding it with her hand.

"No." Kela corrected. "They're bottomless bags. The enchantment was named 'Bottomless baggage' by its creator. So they're bottomless bags."

"Cool." James said simply. He wasn't going to call them that. They were Bags of Holding, he didn't care what anyone else said. As he thought this Veliry and Gixelle switched saddle bags and repeated the process. Before Kela could say any more James jogged over and grabbed one of the bags as the two of them stood up. Gixelle had sweat beading on her forehead.

"Wooh." She said, wiping her brow. "Glad that's over. I hate casting magic. So exhausting."

"Oh please." Veliry countered. "All those muscles and you struggle with a simple bag enchantment?"

"That enchantment is about as strong as my magic gets mage." She replied. "In a pinch I can toss a lightning bolt, but it gives me a damn migraine. If I've got to kill someone I'd rather just swing a sword at em."

"Psssh, lightning bolt. Those two pups over there could probably throw lightning bolts." The mage shot back. "You can join James for lessons while we're traveling."

James, who had been busy trying to see how far he could reach into the bag (he was well past his knee) suddenly snapped back to reality at hearing this.

"What?" he asked in unison with Gixelle.

The two women looked at him, perplexed at his currently bagged leg, as he balanced on his remaining foot.

"What are you doing?" Gixelle asked, eyebrows knit in confusion.

James didn't have any good answers for that question. "Seeing..... how far it goes?"

Veliry, oddly, took the answer in stride. "He's gonna make a good caster." She said. "Lots of curiosity. That's a key trait of the best mages."

Gixelle just facepalmed at the answer. "Get out of the bag James. If you fall in you'll run out of air, and we'll have to send someone in with a rope."

James looked at the bag with wonder. "It's that deep in there?" He asked.

"It's called a bottomless bag for a reason." She answered, exasperated.

James's face was not one of fear, but of wonder. "That is so awesome!"

"Yep." Veliry said. "He'll make a great mage."

An hour later, after the King had arrived with Artair and the group had had a light breakfast, they departed north. Jurl and the children waved goodbye, Jurl promising that James could come over and cook them that meal when they returned. Kela and Amina rode the griffins at the front of the group. Veliry and Irynia took up position in the middle with their minuscule carriage trailing behind them. James and Gixelle rode in the back, discussing the things James would need to do with Steve on the journey.

Before leaving what little signal coverage he had, James sent one last text to his world. He informed them of the trip's start, how he would apparently be learning magic on the way there, the success of their package, that he planned to teach the princess how to shoot (albeit only the basics), and he told them that he had decided to be honest with the King about things. He hit send and watched the little check mark appear just before he saw the last bar drop off, and the no signal icon appeared. He did so on purpose, he didn't want to listen to them bitch about his choices.

It was a good day to ride. The sun was shining, but there was still enough cloud cover to keep things cool as a slight breeze brought the scents of the capital to them.

The journey to see the vanishing blight was officially under way.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (42/?)

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As James was eating his dinner that night, and drinking a large mug of dark ale with it, a messenger arrived. The messenger informed him that something had come through the door and was awaiting both he and the King. James thanked the messenger and then quickly finished his meal, stuffing the food in his mouth and chewing like he was back in training again. Then he downed the remainder of the ale and left for the summoning room.

When he got there the King and Princess were already waiting, as well as high mage Marcos and several royal guards. The King and Princess looked at him warily as he approached. James nodded.

It was very obvious that the princess had told her father about what James had said. There was an air of discomfort between the three of them.

"Evening, your highness." James said. "Princess."

"Mr. Choi." The king replied simply.

"So. What's going on in there now?" James asked.

"A box of some kind came through with notes on it. Marcos said that there was one for each of us. Though he's not as good with your language as Veliry is." Princess Amina answered.

"Oh. Well, what's in the box?" James asked. He kept the message on his phone to himself. In fact, he'd deleted it once he'd read it.

"We don't know yet." She answered. "We were waiting for you."

"Well. I'm here now, so let's see what it is."

The king agreed and the three of them entered. Several guards were standing around the box, and at the kings command they dispersed back to their posts near the walls. James couldn't help but notice that there were more guards near the wall. Some armed with shields and melee weapons, others with bows and crossbows. A few of them had no weapons, or at least none that James could see.

The box in question was, James saw, actually a rigid traveling case. The kind that a band might carry a small instrument in, or that a competitive shooter like himself might carry his weapons in. Spray painted on one

side were green letters that read "UNITED STATES ARMY". Taped to the top of the case were two notes.

"Can I?" He asked the King.

The King, who'd been busy inspecting the case on one knee, looked at him. "Of course. What is this case made of?"

"Ummm." James started as he kneeled down to grab the two notes. "A material called plastic. Uh, not exactly sure how to explain how it's made. But it's a synthetic material. Cheap, but easy to mass produce, and pretty durable when it's used like this."

"Most interesting." Injected Marcos as James was suddenly reminded that the elderly mage was present."

James handed the note for the King to him so he could look at it. "I can read that for you if you want." He offered, as he opened and read his.

Good evening SPC Choi,

We here on Earth hope that this gift finds you healthy and happy. We also hope that you are enjoying your time in the magical world of Petravus. In this case we have enclosed several gifts for both you and the King. We would like you to offer them to him as a show of good will between our nations. We would also like you to take a bottle for yourself so that you can have a little taste of home. Which bottle you choose is between you and the King. We wish you the best of luck in your future adventures, and want you to know that we are doing everything we can to help you.

-Col. Shayna Muhammed.

"Huh, Cool." James said, nonchalantly. To his side the King tucked the note into a pocket in his coat. James reached forward and unclasped the top of the suitcase. When it opened he saw the five bottles sitting in the Styrofoam padding. He'd known they would be there, but he still couldn't help but marvel at the brands on display. "Who-ho-ho!" James exclaimed as he quickly lifted the bottle of scotch.

In his hands he held a bottle of John Walker & Sons Celebratory Blend scotch. An expensive bottle before his lifetime, nowadays it was considered rare. He was holding what amounted to at least two of his paychecks in a single bottle. His face was wide with shock that the Col had sent this.

Beside him the King and the rest present looked at him with curiosity.

"Do you know what this is?" He asked. But he already knew the answer to that. "Oh this is so- HOOO!" He interrupted himself as he gently placed the bottle back and picked up the bottle of Vodka. This one was less impressive, but much more familiar to him, albeit of a type he'd never had access to. "Tito's!?!" He exclaimed. "and Red Round Special? Oh man I

always wanted to try this!" He exclaimed. To his side the King and princess exchanged confused looks.

But his focus was quickly stolen by the bottle of tequila.

The scotch had been impressive because of it's rareness and price. The Vodka had been impressive because of it's familiarity to him and the fact that he'd wanted a bottle of that type for a long time. But the tequila caught his eye for an entirely different reason. He had no doubt that the wine and beer were of a similar quality to the other bottles, but he knew very little about those kinds of drinks. And now he only had eyes for the bottle of tequila.

Sitting in the last slot of the case was a small bottle of brown tequila in a simple tapered bottle. He'd seen one just like it as a child in his father's office. But this one was unopened. He couldn't help but wonder how had they known about this one. But the answer to that was obvious, they probably found that other bottle at his mother's house.

James went oddly quiet at the sight of the bottle. He put the Tito's back down and gingerly lifted the bottle, looking at it with a small smile on his face.

"James?" The princess asked. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah." He said, still smiling. "Just... this was my dad's tequila. My Grandfather gave him a bottle just like it at my parents wedding." In his hands was a bottle of 1800 Colleción. He sat, holding it a moment longer. Then he placed it back in its slot in the foam. "Throughout all the other stuff that happened back home. My mom always held onto it. She hated tequila, but she always kept that bottle. No matter what."

After a few moments the King spoke up. "So what did the note say?" He asked.

"Oh. Um, the people back home wanted to give this to you as a gift. These are," He pointed back at the opened suitcase. "some of the best liquors our world has. Although that one and that one, "He pointed out the wine and beer. "Are wine and beer. The rest are different kinds of hard liquor."

The king held up the bottle of scotch and looked at it curiously. "Such fine craftsmanship on this bottle. You say that these are some of your finest liquors?"

James nodded. "Not the rarest or most highly sought after in the world, obviously. But still top notch stuff. That bottle right there costs at least my entire monthly salary. If not more." At that the eyes of the nearby guards widened, and James heard them murmuring amongst themselves. "Go ahead. Open it, try a sip." James urged him.

King Farrick opened the bottle quickly, sniffing the contents. He was about to take a sip when he froze, Amina was clamping her hand on his shoulder. "Father!" She chided him through clenched teeth.

James watched this curiously and then he realized his error. Of course a king wasn't going to just drink a gift from a country that he'd just warned them was incredibly vicious in its practices. James reached over and snatched the bottle from the King. The King looked at him in shock, anger showing for just a moment. Then James held the bottle up and let some of the rich brown liquid pour into his mouth, in the waterfall style, so that they could see that he was in fact drinking it. He let roughly a sips worth of it spill into his mouth before tilting the bottle back straight. He held the scotch in his mouth for a moment, rolling it around with his tongue, and marveling at the smooth, smoky, sweetness. Then he swallowed slowly, letting the expensive liquor coat his throat on its way down.

"God damn." He said, after a moment. He'd never had a chance to try that particular batch of scotch before. It was as good as he'd hoped. "That's fuckin' incredible." He looked at the bottle for a moment, examining the label and the liquid inside of it. Then he handed it back to the king. "Well. I'm not dead." He joked.

The King and the Princess both looked at him with a mixture of shock and awe. The King quickly put the bottle to his lips before the princess could stop him. He took a small sip of the liquor and then sat, savoring it as James had. When he was done, and had finished swallowing he slowly opened his eyes and looked at James in wonder.

"Good gods man. I might just sign away my kingdom if your people offer to teach us how to make that in exchange." He said. The two of them looked at each other and then laughed. He held the bottle up and looked at it. "Gods that was so smooth. Here, Amina you must try some."

But when he offered the bottle to the princess she declined, pushing it back at him. "Maybe some other time father." She said.

The King looked at her curiously, but then shrugged. He looked back at the bottles still in the case. "You said that note was offering these to me as a gift?" He asked James.

James nodded enthusiastically. "That and they did say that, if you'd allow it, I should choose a bottle for myself. Sort of a 'reminder of home' thing." James said.

King Farrick beamed. "Of course, of course. I take it you want the one that reminds you of your father?"

"If that's alright with you." James answered.

"As long as you let me try some when you open it." The King said.

"Then you've got yourself a deal." James said as he gently grabbed the bottle of tequila again. He looked at it, smiling once more. "Although, we will need some limes and salt."

"What's a lime?" Amina asked him.

James just stared at her for a moment, confused at how something as simple as a lime could be foreign to this world. "Alright, smeplies and salt then."

The king was grabbing and lifting the box when James remembered the hidden contents.

"One last thing." He said before the king could do so.

The King looked at him curiously. "What is it lad?"

James looked at him, not smiling this time. "You and the princess discussed what she and i talked about correct?'

The Kings demeanor changed to match James's. Beside him Amina did the same. The King nodded solemnly. "Aye, we did."

James nodded. Then he continued. "I won't discuss specifics here in front of everyone else." He said, gesturing at Marcos and the other guards. "But I'd like for us to start being more honest with eachother. Within reason, of course."

The King and Princess looked at each other for a moment. Then Amina nodded and the King turned back to him. "Okay. What do you wish to talk about?" He asked.

James thought about how best to word this for a moment. "I..... asked my people for a bit of help regarding a certain issue that had come up with my gear. They hid the answer to it in that box. Can I show you what it is? I don't want it to be a secret between us."

Once again the King looked to his daughter. She spoke up instead. "Please do James."

He felt a small smile try to creep onto his face when she said that. He kneeled back down near the box, then held his hand out to the princess. "Could I borrow a knife for a moment?" After a moment's hesitation, she drew hers and handed it to him, handle first. James heard, rather than saw, the guards around the room putting their hands on their weapons.

He placed the tip of the knife on the foam where his new bottle of tequila had been. Abruptly he stabbed the knife down roughly three inches and began sawing up and down, tracing the outline of the bottle shaped space. When he was done he lifted up the cut out piece of foam and tossed it aside.

Sitting in the newly revealed compartment were six magazines for his pistol. Each of them was loaded with twenty real bullets like the ones he had in the pistol on his hip. But these ones were of a higher quality, and instead of the rounded copper jackets, these were hollow points.

He stepped aside so that the King, Princess, and Mage could see them. But nobody else in the room could.

"You three are probably the only other people in this room that knows what these are. Well, kind of anyways." He said. "These are the only ones in this case. You guys can confirm that later if you want. But I need these if I still want to be able to use my pistol much longer. On top of that." He looked at the princess. "Now that I have these, I can use the other ones I already had to show you how to use IT." He left the fact that IT was his pistol, unsaid. They knew what he was talking about.

He and the King stared at each other for several long moment. It was obvious that King Farrick was not a fan of these kinds of deceptions. But James wasn't either, and he had a feeling that the King at least understood the need of them. After a moment, the King broke the silence.

"I'll have these bottles brought to my quarters." He said, gently placing the discarded piece of foam back in its place. "Once I've found a good place in my personal bar for them I'll send the case back to you. I'm sure something this.... **reliable**... will be of great use in your upcoming trip." He said. The hint incredibly obvious.

James smiled, and it wasn't a smile of subterfuge, it was one of genuine understanding.

"I appreciate it sir." He said.

"When you get back. You'll have to tell me more of these other bottles. I'll enjoy this lovely one until then." He said, patting the bottle of scotch in its padded slot, before closing the case and gesturing for Amina to take it."

"I look forward to it your highness." James said. "Hopefully the princess will try some when we do." Amina blushed lightly at the suggestion.

And then the small group disbanded and headed their separate ways. James to his room, with the bottle of tequila held carefully in both hands. The King and Princess to the King's chambers, her carrying the case.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (41/?)

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The next day, after waking up oddly relaxed, James went to the stable to meet Gixelle.

He felt bad about not keeping his promise to take Steve out riding. He'd intended to take the drake out to the nearest river so he could drink, relax, and stretch his legs. But the conversation with the princess, and

it's resulting emotional distress, had lasted into the night and exhausted him.

But today they would ride for sure.

When he arrived the first thing he saw was Maxel sitting outside of Steve's pen patiently. For all her yellow serpentine qualities, James couldn't help but be reminded of a grey hound sitting on it's hind legs. The yellow drake seemed like it was inconvenienced by being the very thought of being here.

As he was thinking this, the doorway between the pens opened up. Gixelle walked out with a large bundle of leather and wood that he assumed must be Steve's saddle. When she saw him she used her head to beckon him over, her hands being full of the saddle set up. He jogged over to help.

"Good morning James. Come help me lay this out so I can show you how it goes on."

"Yeah, no problem. Good morning." He replied. As he jogged up the door slammed open again and Prince Artair came hobbling out on a crutch. His right leg was wrapped in bandages and had two wooden rods going down each side.

"Yeah yeah, morning morning. It's great to be up, and alive, and ten fucking miles from my goddam bed." The prince greeted them. As he got out side he quickly closed the door and leaned up against the wall next to it, breathing heavily.

"Morning sunshine." James said with a mocking smile as Gixelle handed him some of the saddle. "How's the leg treating you so far?"

"Oh. As you can see; it's fucking fantastic." The prince replied as he began massaging the limb through the bandages. "On the upside, I'll get the better part of a month without any of you around because of it."

"You're not going with us tomorrow?" James asked, not really surprised.

Artair pointed at his leg. "Healers said I need at least another week before I can even consider riding. Much less going on a week long journey and then riding back."

"Eh, fair enough." James replied as he laid out the saddle following Gixelles gestures.

The saddle was odd. Unlike any James had ever seen before. But that didn't surprise him too much either. Steve was a creature unlike any James had seen before coming to this world. So it made sense to him that the saddle would be too.

As they laid it out Gixelle explained it to him.

"All the riders that attended chipped in for the materials and labor." She told him. "That's just how we do first saddles for new riders. But

they lent more than that." She pulled a long, somewhat rubbery piece of leather flat in the middle of the clustered components. "They lent knowledge. You're not the first bristle neck rider. Hell, we have one other just in this country. And two more besides that in the clan total. We've ridden with those members before. So we made sure to put in some of the common features."

"Like what?" James asked.

"Well," She said finally getting the piece completely laid out. "like this piece. Steve's fur is nice and soft. I'm guessing it actually feels pretty good to sit on right?"

"Yeah, it wasn't bad." He admitted.

"Because of that, a normal saddle seat. The rigid, preformed, kind isn't necessary. This," She pointed at the leather in front of her. "will be your seat. Go on feel it."

James stepped forward and felt the seat leather. It was about an eighth of an inch thick. It was remarkably smooth and soft. Instead of feeling like a saddle he felt like it was meant to be used for a nice pair of gloves. It couldn't have been cheap.

"That's Wobbamong belly." Gixelle said.

"It's fuckin' what?" He asked, perplexed at the clan mother's nonsensical words.

"Uuuum, think like a giant toad. Only it has three tongues and its eyes can put most creatures in a trance." She said. "But their skin makes for excellent leather once it's conditioned."

James just stared at her, horrified at the notion of what she'd just described.

"Go on." She said. "Twist it. Pull it. Try to push a finger through it. That stuff is incredibly stretchy and durable."

Cautiously, he did. Sure enough the leather seemed to stretch well beyond what normal leather would. He couldn't help but admit that it probably made for great gear.

"That will sit on top of Steve's back. It'll provide a bit of cover so that you can avoid getting his hair anywhere you don't want to. But it'll also stretch and conform to fit him comfortably so that he doesn't feel too constrained." She lifted a large hard leather arch with a small rounded nub on the front. "This will be your saddle horn. It'll hold that taut up front. Then your stirrups and your saddle bags will hold the rest of it in place. Now come on, let's get this on the beast. You're doin' it. Not me."

The process of getting the saddle on Steve was.... difficult.

The drake wasn't even happy to have the muzzle on its face. But that was enchanted to resist damage, so he didn't have a lot of choice in the matter. The saddle was only enchanted on its straps and saddle horn. And even those were only enchanted lightly in case they were pulled on too hard. James had to be very careful not to let Steve scratch at the saddle too much.

Steve was not a fan of any of this.

After roughly an hour of chasing the drake around his pen and scrambling to get the various components in place, James finally managed to get the saddle assembled on Steve's back. The downside was that the only way to keep Steve from forcibly removing it, was for James to be ON the saddle. Steve wasn't willing to begin raking the saddle with his claws while James was on it, nor was he willing to thrash about and risk causing himself pain if he incidentally caused James injury.

But, ultimately, James was successful.

As Gixelle opened the external gate on Steve's pen James rode the massive drake out slowly. The reins weren't like normal reins that other new drake riders used. Instead of fitting a bar or strap into Steve's mouth, instead it simply clamped onto some of the fur on either side of Steve's head. Steve actually reacted well to these. He turned left and right when James pulled on them, even lightly. He had a feeling that they reminded Steve of the first ride they'd had together. Speaking of which, the stirrups were amazing. They were a touch difficult to get into while he was wearing his combat boots, but once he was in them they were comfortable, and he was capable of getting out of them just fine.

After he'd successfully saddled and mounted Steve, and gotten him out of the pen, Gixelle climbed onto Maxel and the two of them began riding. Artair just threw his hands up in exasperation. He'd basically been forgotten about during the saddling process, though in fairness he hadn't exactly been helping anyways.

James and Gixelle rode for about an hour, eventually reaching a bend in the nearby river. Once they got there they both dismounted and tied their drakes to separate trees. The leads tying them were long, long enough that either drake could roam for a good thirty yards in any direction. Steve and Maxel drank from the river, and Steve watched curiously as Maxel's head darted into the water, emerging with a large fish in her teeth. Steve tried to copy it, and instead ended up with a mouthful of river mud.

"Solid effort bud!" James said to the drake as it shook its head off. "I'm gonna be brushing that out of his fur for a week."

Gixelle laughed lightly. "How was the ride? Any issues with the saddle?"

James turned to her. "No. The saddle's great. That seat is so cushy with his fur under it."

"Told you." She replied. "Now tell me what's going on with you."

"Hmmm?"

"You've been off all morning." She said. She grabbed him by the shoulders and turned him to face her. Then she looked him up and down. "On the one hand you seem like you're... relieved, about something. But on the other hand your eyes are a bit red and puffy, and you've been quiet. Last time we rode together you were all questions. This time you've barely said a word. What's going on?"

James looked away, uncomfortable with how easily the older woman had read him.

"Just uh. I just kinda, think I finally let some stuff hit me last night that was overdue. Dam kinda broke, you know?" He said, looking down at the ground.

"Was it about your friend?"

"A good bit of it yeah." He admitted. "But um, some other stuff too."

"Yeah? Anything you want to talk about."

James considered this. He wasn't sure if Gixelle would understand. But then again the woman had spent more time fighting and taming monsters than he had even been alive. Maybe she'd understand better than anyone else.

"Has the clan ever gathered all in one place?" He asked. "And not for the big meeting party things you told me about before. But like, being summoned all to the same spot."

"What? Like being summoned to war unexpectedly?" She asked jokingly.

"Yeah." He replied. It was clear to her that he wasn't joking the way she was.

Her face hardened. "It's been a long time. Years before I was born, even. But it has happened."

"What does it take to make it happen?"

Gixelle looked at him warily. "James. What is this about?"

"What would it take Gixelle?" She could tell from his tone and from his face that he was worried about something.

She called Maxel over, the yellow drake lazily strutting over to her with Steve following. Once they met Gixelle climbed up and reached into one of her saddle bags. James noticed that her arm seemed to reach further into the bag than it should have been able to, and that the bag didn't seem to bulge or stretch because of it. But that was a curiosity for a later time.

When she returned she was carrying a small horn. On the sides of the horn were glowing glyphs that he knew embedded the item with magic. There were a lot of them. She held it up. He reached for it, but she pulled it back.

"You, can't hold this James." She said. "Only I can. If anyone else handles it, it'll crumble to dust."

"That horn summons the clan?" He asked.

She nodded her head. "If I blow this horn. Every clan member in the world will begin heading to my location as fast as their mounts will carry them. These horns are only blown in dire times."

James looked at the horn, and then back up at her. Then he nodded understanding.

"Good. Keep it ready." He said.

"James what is going on?" She asked. "Why do you want to know about this?"

He thought for a moment. "Last night I spoke to Amina." He said at last.

"Oh?" She said, a slight smirk on her lips.

"Not like that." He assured her. "We spoke about the history of our worlds. Namely, the difference in levels of bloodshed and amounts of wars."

"Oh?" This time she wasn't smiling.

"I think." He paused. "No. I know that my people are trying to come here. And if they do.... I don't think I want this place to be destroyed." He admitted. "I mean. I still have a lot to learn about this place, and it definitely has it's flaws. But even still, I don't want things to go the way I think they might."

"You think your people will destroy this place?" She scoffed. "Nobody's that powerful James."

"You might be surprised." He said. When she looked at him, she saw that he believed it.

The two of them stood there silently for a moment. Then he spoke again.

"If I ever use my signal to summon the clan. I don't think it'll be to induct a new member Gixelle. I think it'll probably be to warn you to blow that horn."

She looked at the horn, then back at him. What he was implying scared her more than anything she'd faced in a long time.

A while later, after the two drakes had drank and eaten their fill, the two of them rode back in silence. Gixelle helped him take Steve's saddle

off and store it in the stables. Then the two of them went their separate ways to ready for the next day's journey.

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Later that night, in the room of the god's door, another portal opened. This one was a little larger, and flickered less than the last one. It still only lasted several seconds. But before it closed a suitcase, made of hardened polymer, dropped through it.

On the front of the suitcase were two notes. One was addressed to "SPC CHOI, JAMES M." the other was addressed to "His Royal Majesty, King Farrick". None of the guards present could read the words. But a runner was sent to alert the king anyways.

Inside the case, padded by Styrofoam were five bottles of alcohol. There was Scotch, Vodka, Wine, a large bottle of Austrian beer, and a bottle of Tequila. Tax payers would never find out about them, but each bottle was worth at least three hundred dollars back on Earth. These bottles were easily discovered. Anyone looking into the case would only see them and the Styrofoam. And if someone were to remove the padding the case would be empty afterwards.

But the real prize was hidden embedded deep within the padding. When James returned to the castle his phone received instructions in a (painful to read) mixture of Spanish, Korean, and English about the hidden contents of the case.

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At the same time that the case of alcohol was being dropped through the portal in the castle, another portal was opening up elsewhere.

The location of this portal was several thousand miles away from the castle, and just a few miles away from a small fishing village on the edge of a small lake. Just like the second test opening, this one flickered a little bit, and was also only about five or six inches wide. Just like that test it only lasted a few seconds. Another small black ball dropped through it, landing on the ground.

Several flashes of light strobed out from the black ball. Then, once again, the little ball popped and emitted a foul smelling smoke.

Nearby, a group of small furry humanoid creatures saw the flashes of light. In fact, one of their scouts was temporarily dazed by the intense brightness of them. The creatures moved toward the source of the unexpected interruption of their raid. But, by the time they got to it, the device had already destroyed itself.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (40/?)

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Writer's note: Despite what I said last night. Here's more. And it comes with both feels, and backstory about what's gone on on earth between our IRL history, and James's.

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As James continued to cry, sobbing into the vest of his dead friend, Princess Amina stood behind him awkwardly. She cursed herself for being so foolish.

Of course they hadn't cleaned it, those fools. She thought. *The mages probably ordered that nobody so much as touch anything once they got it. But still,* She scolded herself. *I should have payed closer attention. Stupid.*

Still James continued crying, doubled over with his hands on the ground next to the vest. He was taking long ragged breaths and she could see snot running from his nose. He was saying something but it was incomprehensible. Then she noticed that he'd removed the medallion and thrown it aside.

She didn't know what to do. She'd seen people die before, in battle. But the last time someone close to her had had deal with a loss this great she had been a child dealing with her mother's death, and she had been dealing with it too. She had no idea how to deal with this.

She decided to do what she'd done in countless battles before. Because that was what this was now. It just wasn't her battle, it was James's. She followed her instincts.

She walked forward and crouched behind James, hiking her dress up a bit so she wouldn't step on it. She grabbed the medallion with her left hand so he would understand her. Then she placed the right hand on his back, feeling the great ragged breaths and trembling sobs run through him. Tears welled in her eyes too.

"James." She said. He jumped, surprised that she'd spoken to him. But he didn't stop. "James. I'm sorry. I didn't realize that they hadn't cleaned it yet. I..... I shouldn't have brought it."

His hands moved and he grabbed the vest again, his knuckles white as he clenched it as hard as he could. He pressed it against himself again.

"HEEEE!" He said in an agonizingly ragged voice. He snorted his nose clear. "HE DIED RIGHT THERE!" He forced out a ragged breath, blowing snot and spittle onto the vest. "RIGHT THERE NEXT TO ME!" James's hands flexed and the vest shifted. "IT WAS ON MY HANDS!" He flattened the vest out, letting it go as his arms stretched forward, palms up and fingers splayed. "IT WAS ON MY HANDS! I FELT IT!" He shook with more sobs. "THAT

DIDN'T HAVE TO HAPPEN!" This time his voice range with rage. Another deep ragged breath. He tried to say more. But, medallion or not, it was incomprehensible.

Amina quickly tucked the medallion into her left pocket, feeling the tears slowly rolling down her cheek. Before she knew what she was doing she had grabbed his arms from behind and pulled them in front of him, curling him back into a ball. She held him like this as he continued to cry.

"I'm so sorry James." She said into his back. It did nothing to quiet his cries. "You're right. It didn't have to happen and I'm so sorry." There was nothing else she could say or do for this poor, broken man in front of her. So they just stayed that way, her holding him together as he fell apart. By the time he was done, the sun had begun to set.

After James had cried himself to sleep Amina turned him over and lifted him, like she'd done for so many wounded before, and carried him to his bed. For his size she couldn't help but notice that he was startlingly heavy. She placed him there, as gently as she could, and rolled the side of his blanket over him. She went back out into the hall and requested that a passing servant bring some light food and some wine and water.

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When James awoke it was already night time. He felt sore, and he was thirsty. He vaguely remembered what had happened. But it was hazy, like something out of a bad dream. He sat up in the bed, about to get up and grab something to drink when he noticed the light coming from Kela's room.

When he opened the door the princess was sitting in the chair near the table again, as if she'd never left the spot. He knew better though. He looked at her, then he looked at the cart. It was back the way it had been before he'd grabbed the vest. She didn't say anything as he went back up to it.

He lifted the vest up again and for just a moment she thought that he might break down again. But instead he just ran his fingers over the patch with the Sergeant's name on it.

"Did you do this?" He asked. "Did you clean it up while I was out?"

"Yes." She had spent nearly an hour with a wet cloth and some of Kela's soap trying to get the blood out. It was still damp, and there was still a faint red tinge. She knew full well that it would never be completely clear.

He just stood there for a minute. Then he hugged the vest one last time. He placed it back down, and then picked up the helmet. He pulled the elastic band off of it that said ODIKOWE and AB+. Then he wrapped it around his right wrist, doubling it over twice so it would fit. Then he placed the helmet back down as well.

When he spoke again he said it softly, hands braced on the sides of the cart. "Thank you."

She replied just as softly. "It's no issue. I'm sorry, that I didn't notice that before I brought it all here."

"It's okay."

"Are you alright? I had them bring some food and drinks if you need anything."

He looked back, glancing at the food for a moment, and at her. It was just a moment, and then he went back to looking at the cart, but her cheeks flushed and she looked away. She busied herself with pouring him a glass of water.

"Sorry you had to see me like that." He said. As he did he busied himself with checking the pistol to see what condition it was in. He noticed the two missing rounds, but he didn't say anything. What point was there in doing so?

She sat, silent, and watched him check the gear on the cart. After a few minutes she spoke.

"I wasn't just angry because you took Kela from me, you know?" She asked as he continued. He paused for a moment. "I mean, I was mad about that." She continued. "But also; we summoned a hero. And the gods gave us a giant chunk of metal that we couldn't understand." She gulped, not sure of how to say the next part. "A man who was gravely ill." James paused again. "And the only remaining person that came through was this small little man who'd tried to- no... did, kill my friend and take her from me." She gripped her dress tightly in her hands. "And the fact that that little man could even do that? It scared me. In fact, me admitting that it worried me is part of the reason that my father is so worried."

James just listened, not moving. She was about to begin talking again when he spoke, startling her somewhat.

"You're both right to be scared." He said, head hanging low.

"What?" She asked, surprised.

"I said you should be scared." He repeated. He turned around, and slid down the side of the cart until he was sitting on the floor, legs splayed and hands at his side. "You should be scared of my government."

"Why?" She asked, as curious as she was concerned.

"Because. They've been nice so far. They've spoken to the king and acted all nice and friendly and diplomatic." He began shaking his head. "But that's not who they are. That's *NEVER* been who they are."

"What do you mean?"

"How many wars has this world seen?" He asked.

"What? What do you mean?" She asked, confused.

"If you had to guess. Based on your recorded history. How many wars would you say this world has seen." He saw her start to think then he added. "And before you start counting. I'm not talking about little scuffles over two kings having a slapping contest, or little bitty rebellions that last a week or two. I'm talking full blown, knock down, drag out, redraw the world maps, type wars."

She thought about it for a minute. Admittedly there were quite a few that that last statement discounted. But that still left a lot of wars remaining. After a minute she had a guess. "A few dozen I suppose. The threat of world level magic keeps most wars short and easy. Plus the control of certain monsters cau-"

"None of that matters. A few dozen..... Over the course of how many years?"

"I... I don't know. Three thousand years? Records get a little convoluted after that." She admitted.

"Three thousand years? A few dozen wars in three thousand?" His eyes widened at that. "Fuck.... y'all are lightweights."

"What? That's a lot of death for three thousand years James. Don't mock it."

"Hold up." He said shaking his head a bit at the numbers. "In your absolute worst, bloodiest, most devastating war. How many people died?"

"That was the war of the bells. It lasted nearly a decade and cost the kingdom, or rather that kingdom at that time, nearly three hundred thousand people." She said, her arms crossed angrily at his mockery.

"Heh, that's adorable." He said. She huffed at him. "What? It is." When he saw her look of doubt he continued. "My country." He pointed at his chest emphatically. "MY country. Has only been around for two hundred seventy, or two hundred eighty years or so." He took a deep breath. "We've had fifteen wars."

She gasped. How could a single country be so blood thirsty? And then he continued.

"Our bloodiest." He was looking up at the ceiling, he shook his head. "Our bloodiest was the water war. I was..... five.... six." He looked down, and seemed sad. As if remembering something painful. "That was the one that took my father from me. Between the drafted troops, and the attacks on coastal cities..... we lost twelve million people. My dad was one of them."

"Million?" She staggered at the thought. "Million? Twelve million people? James, how?"

"We weren't even the worst hit." He said somberly. "China threw bodies at other countries until the end of it. They lost over two hundred million."

Her mind reeled. That a country could even have that many people was impressive, but that they had so many more that they could throw that amount of people at their enemies. What kind of world was this?

James was still talking. "Hell, our country had a war that cost us over six hundred thousand people. And it was a war with ourselves." He said, laughing lightly.

"What?" She asked, not believing what she'd just heard. "Did you just say that your country lost six hundred thousand people? Against itself?"

"Yeah." He said nonchalantly. It was like he was talking about some old, fond, memory. "Civil war. Four years, and over six hundred thousand dead. We kicked our own asses." He laughed again.

"What?" She tried to ask a question, but nothing came to mind to ask. How could you even explain something like that? How could you even quantify so many people dying in four years.

"Least that war was for something that made sense." He said, somber once more. "The war I was training for ended years before I was even born. Hell the water war ended when I was nine." He shook his head in disgust. "Twelve million people..... My father being one of em. Just... gone. Over fucking drinkable water."

"Water? That was what so many died for?" She asked. She hadn't even noticed that she'd stood up and was up against the wall.

He looked up at her. "I know. Fuckin stupid right? But that's what I'm talking about. It's not just my government Amina. It's all the governments of my world." He hung his head again. "They'll kill you over a goddam glass of water if they think it's necessary." He paused. "If they think they can justify it."

She didn't know what to think of any of this. She had to tell her father. He needed to know who he was dealing with on the other side of the door. She was about to begin walking to the door when James stood up and dusted himself off. She could see that his eyes were wet again when he wiped them off.

"Sorry. Just, thinking of my dad kinda does that for me." He said. "Hey. Um.." He pointed at the cart. "Thank you.... for that." He looked down at the ground. "And.... for earlier. I think I needed that."

In all the talk of violence and bloodshed on a different world she'd nearly forgotten about his breakdown earlier. It took a moment for her to remember that despite all that she'd seen of him, and all he'd just told her. This man standing in front of her. Was still just that. A man, as vulnerable to weariness and heartache as anyone else. She had the sudden dawning realization that, as mad and confused as she'd been when he'd

first gotten here. He had been through so much more than she could even imagine.

So she acted on her instincts once more, and hugged him. It took a moment before he realized what was happening. But then he hugged her back. After several seconds they parted, and she rushed out of the room. As much as she wanted to comfort him, she had to tell her father of what she'd just learned.

After she left, James offloaded the gear on the cart into his room. He went out to Kela's armor room and grabbed one of the spare stands that stood empty in the corner. He brought it into his room and hung Sgt. Odikowe's vest and helmet from it. He draped the Sergeant's dog tags over the front. Then he drank some of the water, and ate some of the fruit that Amina had left behind.

Then he slept. It wasn't an easy, or peaceful sleep. But somehow, it refreshed him, and he felt better when he woke up.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (39/?)

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[First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: This is a bit of a long one. And I'm posting it preemptively because I don't expect to have time to tomorrow. Beware onions and enjoy.

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When James woke the next morning, he took the book, the glasses, and a pen from his pack downstairs and grabbed some breakfast. Once he'd gotten breakfast, he took it up to the patio that Kela had taken him to back when he'd first gotten here. He sat at a small table, enjoying the tea, toast, eggs, and salted smeplies as he got to work on the book.

The book, as he'd seen before contained several pages of simple nursery rhyme style stories and poems. It also had several pages that went into detail about the kingdom. Nothing too interesting, as he came to find out. Mostly the kind of information that you might find at a welcome center in a brochure. Good info to have, but nothing too groundbreaking either.

He got about a third of the way through the book before getting incredibly bored with it and deciding to actually get to business for the day. He stood up and one of the castle attendants rushed to clear the table before he could even say anything. He returned to his room so he could drop the book and glasses off.

After that he decided to visit Steve, giving him a few chickens to chase, and promising to take him out for a ride later on. Then he paid a visit to Kraug.

Kraug's window was already open when James arrived. The surly quartermaster having already been working with the castle guard for several hours by now. The massive Orc beamed when he saw James get in line, and waved James over. The two guards in line before him turned to regard him and quickly moved out of his way once they saw the green medallion hanging from his neck.

"Oy, hero! How's that armor treatin' ya? Congratulations with the clan by the way. Big accomplishment for a pipsqueak like you." Kraug said, slapping James on the shoulder through the window.

"Hey Kraug." James replied. "Thanks. And the armor's good. It actually works pretty well just over my normal uniform."

"Good to hear. Hey," Kraug pulled him in close, and whispered in his ear. "I heard you and a certain member of da royal family was gettin a lil chummy, eh?"

James's face flushed red. "I don't know what you're talking about." He said as he pushed Kraug away from him. "Nope, not happening."

"BWAHAHAHA!" Kraug bellowed. "Look at your face. You're redder than a Kobold's ass after eatin' dwarven burner bomb sausages!" The massive Orc doubled over laughing.

James looked at the line of guards behind him uneasily. "Sorry for the holdup guys." He said. They stared at him, uncaring of his plight. "Kraug." He said, through clenched teeth. "Knock it off man. I'm here for weapons."

The shift in the Orcs demeanor was like night and day. Upon the mention of weapons, Kraug stood up straight and almost immediately stopped laughing, though he still had to catch his breath.

"Ahem." The orc coughed as he brought himself back in line. "Right, weapons. Sorry hero, just bustin ya a bit. Whatcha want to know about weapons?"

"Well." James said. "I'm sure you've heard about the trip me and the others are heading out on this week. Right?"

"Yeah." Kraug admitted. "Headin' up past Jadesport. Goin to see what the fuss is all about with your summonin'."

"Yeah, exactly." James said. "Anyways. I have armor, and all sorts of other gear. I get my saddle for Steve tomorrow."

"Congrats on gettin you a drake by the way."

"Thanks man. But, I still don't have a weapon yet." James admitted.

"I heard you had a right deadly enough weapon in that little scuffle with Arty." Kraug said, making a point to look at the holster on James's hip as he did.

"Well.... yeah." James admitted reluctantly. "But I want to limit how often I use this. You know, emergencies only."

"Emergencies only eh?" Kraug mused. "Like puttin' Arty's leg in a splint for damn near a week? Don'tget me wrong; that blowhard deserved it for what he done to ya. But still seemed a bit harsh."

"Better than being dead." James replied. "Or banished, like he wanted for me."

Kraug considered this, then shrugged. "Yeah, fair enough. What was you thinkin' o' using?"

"Well, most of my training back home was with knives." James said. "But the shield and short sword I used against Artair actually felt really good to me. Mind if I try some of those out?"

"Ah!" Kraug exclaimed with a smile. "A sword n' board kinda guy. Bout as basic a setup as a guy can get. But it's been an army standard since the dawn o' time for a reason. It works." As he said this Kraug went back behind the window and began rummaging around. After a few minutes of clanging, cursing, and crashing he emerged with four different swords and three different shields.

One shield was a simple rounded wooden shield with a cap on it, like the one James had used in the duel. Another was the classic knight shield he'd seen in countless movies, flat on one end and a sharp point on the other, it also had the Petravian crest on it. The last was shaped like a crescent moon.

"What's this one for?" James asked, holding up the crescent shaped one.

"Ah, I'd actually recommend you keep that one. Regardless of which of the other two you prefer." Kraug answered. At James's confused look he continued. "It's designed for when you're on horseback. OR, in your case, on your drake. It's made so that you can wear it on your back while riding, and so you can use a spear or lance or whatever while riding. Real good for not gettin' shot in the back too."

"Huh, cool. Yeah, I guess I'll keep that then." James agreed. Then he put the kite shield on his arm. He tested how it felt, raising, lowering, and striking with it. But something about it just didn't feel right. He did the same with the round shield and found it much more comfortable. "I think I'll take this one too."

Kraug nodded his head. "Nothin' beats simple. Now try out the swords." He pointed at some training dummies on the other end of the courtyard. "When

you figure out which one you like just bring the other ones back and set em on the counter."

"Sweet. Thanks dude." James said. Kraug just nodded and then waved at the next soldier in line. James looked back and realized that now there were six people behind him. He winced. "Sorry guys."

After about twenty minutes of testing the four swords on the dummies, striking from multiple angles, and he couldn't help recreating a few movie scenes. James settled on one that was about two feet long and had a somewhat leaf shaped blade. It reminded him of sting from lord of the rings. He set the other three on the counter and carried his new gear upstairs to his room.

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When James arrived at the room, he saw someone he didn't really want to see, standing outside the door. He had to assume that they were waiting for him. He froze for just a moment as he rounded the corner and saw who it was.

"Princess." He said, nodding. "What can I do for you?" As he said this, he noticed that the princess wasn't alone. Standing on the other side of the hall were two servants with a cart between them. The cart was covered with a red cloth.

"Mr. Choi. Good evening. Do you think we could speak?" She asked. He was a little thrown off by the lack of hostility, and as he noticed that he was further thrown off by the lack of armor and sword as well.

He pointed at the black and red dress she was wearing. "You seem somewhat informal compared to normal. What's going on?"

"The last time we spoke I got the feeling that you were somewhat.... guarded." She said, wringing her hands as she did. "Like you were holding something back. And I wanted to make a gesture of good will. Especially since we're about to spend more than a fortnight together on the road."

James opened the door and walked in. "Well, this is your castle. Not exactly going to tell you that you can't go somewhere." He said, and beckoned her in.

She followed him in. As she moved through Kela's foyer/armor room she touched several of the armor pieces. "Kela always was a bit obsessed with keeping things tidy." She said as she admired one of Kela's helmets. "Werewolves always get the most intimidating helmets."

"Uh huh." James said. More than a little confused. The princess must've seen that helmet before, probably hundreds of times. This whole situation was odd. He continued on through Kela's bedroom and opened the door to his room. He dropped the two shields just inside the door and placed the sword on the dresser.

"How are you liking Kela's guest room?" The princess asked as she took a seat in on Kela's bed.

James walked back out and leaned on his doorway casually. "It's a nice enough room I guess." He didn't really know where to go with the conversation, so he decided to just plow ahead. "So, what's going on?"

The princess thought for a moment. Then she stood up and walked over to the table and sat at the chair. "Would you join me please?" She asked, gesturing to the chair opposite of her.

James thought for a moment. Then stood up and walked over to the chair. As he sat down, he had to ask the seemingly obvious question. "This isn't about the whole 'sleeping together' thing.... is it?"

The princess's face turned red, and she clenched her jaw a bit. "I thought we weren't going to talk about that."

"Hey." James said, raising his hands. "Just weird that you're here is all. Especially with Kela not being here. And you not in armor. I didn't break some huge royal law, or something did I? And what's with the guys and the cart outside?"

"That's what I'm here to discuss." She answered. "And while I'm sure there's some law somewhere saying you can't sleep with me that's not what I'm here about."

"Oh, thank god. I thought I was about to be forced into another duel, or a marriage or something. I really don't want to have to shoot anyone else for a while." He laughed to make sure she knew he was joking.

"I wouldn't let you even if that were the case." She countered, smiling a bit. After a moment she looked back up. "I am here to talk about your pistol though."

"Ah, that again." James pointed his finger at her. "I knew it. I knew you were prying for info back at the stables." He stood back up.

"James please sit down." She requested. He still liked it when she said his name, even though right now he knew he shouldn't.

"No." He said, turning back to look at her. "You just want to know how my pistol works so that you guys can make one of your own."

"You're right." She said, matter of factly.

"Yeah I am.... Wait what?" He asked, confused.

She sighed, looking away for a moment. Then she turned back, looking at the ground in shame. "My father is a good man, and a good king. But he fears your government." She admitted.

James didn't have an answer for that.

"Your government has technology we have no answer for. That pistol of yours," She pointed at his holster. "Killed an armored werewolf three times over in a space of seconds. It made one of the best trained swordsmen in the land look like a fool. And then it put him in the healer's ward for a week." She thought for a moment. "And your people are the first to have ever reopened the god's door for even a second." She looked legitimately concerned. "Noone's ever done that before. And he fears, rightly so, what will happen if they manage to send more people through." She pointed at him. "More soldiers. You've said yourself that you're not even very high up in your military. What if they send people who are?"

What could he say? She was right. "So what? You just expect me to let you know anything you want?"

"No." She replied. "No, as a fellow soldier I don't expect that. In fact, I'm surprised you've worked with us at all." She looked him in the eyes. "But we need to know what we may be up against if your people decide to be our enemies."

"Trust me." He said, looking right back at her. "If they decide that you guys are their enemies." He drew his pistol and threw it on the table in front of her. She jumped when he did. "A pistol will be the least of this kingdom's problems." He pointed at it. "You wanna know about it so bad? Go ahead. Take it. Fire every round I have left. Let your mages tear it apart. That aint NOTHIN' compared to what they've got."

"That's what I'm talking about James." She refused to look at the pistol. Instead, she looked at him, a pleading look in her eyes. "I'm my father's protector. I'm a general in his army. And I'm a princess." She said, sounding almost sad to admit it. "I have to protect my people. I have to protect my kingdom. And I can't do that from these things. None of us can." She said, pushing the pistol away as she did.

The two of them stayed that way, in silence, for several long moments.

The princess broke the silence first. "A man. A young man. Was pulled from his world unexpectedly, and against his will. He saw death within moments of arrival. He learned he was in a world that was akin to his world's myths. Was thrown at a monster, and nearly killed. Defeated a great duelist, a great captain, and allied with a powerful clan of monster riders. All in the space of a little over a week. And throughout all of this, he remained calm. Or at least as calm as anyone could expect him to." She paused. "He did, in two weeks, enough heroic deeds to make most men the subject of great songs and poems. And he did it while ill equipped and ill prepared. And all along he'd told the people of this new world that, among his kind, he wasn't even impressive in rank or skill." She paused again. "Now tell me. How would you feel if that man's world was potentially aligned against you?"

He listened. She was right. "Probably pretty damn worried." He admitted.

"Yeah." She agreed, eyes watering. "Pretty damn worried."

"Soooo.... What do you want from me?" He asked.

She wiped her eyes. "My father tasked me with learning more about your pistol. And, if possible, your rifle."

"So, you guys do have my rifle?" He asked.

"Yes." She answered, sounding annoyed. "We have your rifle."

"I'm guessing that I'm not gonna get that back any time soon?"

"That's not my decision." She admitted.

"So, what do you want from me then?"

"You don't have to tell me how the pistol works." She said. "But do you think you could at least show me how to use it?"

"Why? So you can use the pistol Sergeant Odikowe had when he came through?" He asked.

"That's why the servants are outside." She said.

"What?"

"Come in!" She yelled.

The doors to the room opened, and the two servants came in, the covered cart between them. Once they came in, they turned the cart so that the side was toward James and the princess. Then they bowed and left.

"What's this?" He asked, approaching the cart.

"A show of trust." She answered. "Take a look."

James looked back at the red cloth covering it. He grabbed a corner, unsure of what to expect. When he pulled it off, he saw the last thing that he HAD expected.

On top of the cart sat an assault pack loaded with gear, a helmet, a belt with combat knife, pistol, and mags on it, and an IOTBS bullet proof vest with its gear pouches still MOLLE'd to it. He reached out to the vest. On the upper middle chest piece were a Sergeant's chevrons and block letters that said ODIKOWE. He ran his fingers over them as his left hand lifted the vest. There was still blood on the side of the collar where Kela had killed him.

James hugged the vest to his chest. Then, slowly, he fell to his knees and began crying.

Behind him, the princess stood up, surprised at the reaction. She'd been too focused on the pistol to notice that the blood was still there. For some reason, his tears made her heart ache with sorrow.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (38/?)

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After James had made his way back to the castle, he called the number the Colonel had given him to get in contact. The Colonel wasn't there, so he'd ended up talking to a Major Holden that worked for her. He did it outside in the courtyard near one of the archery ranges that was empty, so nobody was around. He also spoke in Korean, just to be safe. He only had two bars on his phone out here, but he figured that would be enough.

He told the Major about the conflict with the prince and his resulting acquirement of Steve as a mount. James was ordered to take pictures of Steve and, if possible, Prince Artair so they could see them for themselves. He also told them about Clan Drakrid, though he kept the details to a minimum. He also told the Major that if they were thinking of making a move on the prince, that they shouldn't. Then he told them why, telling the story of how he'd humiliated and injured the prince in a legal duel.

The Major had been somewhat upset with James for revealing Army weaponry on the people of this world. James countered this by saying that he'd already done that when he first arrived. He also added that doing so had gotten his pistol back into his possession. The Major had to admit that he made fair points.

It did bring him to his real reason for him to call. He informed the Major of his ammo situation. He also warned the Major that he had reason to believe that the royal family was actively trying to learn about the workings of the pistol. James also admitted that he'd yet to obtain any of Sgt Odikowe's gear, and so had to assume that the King's staff had the Sergeant's pistol, and was studying it. The Major informed James that that had been assumed to be the case by their counter intelligence officers that were working on the situation. In short, it was what it was, and both they and James would just have to adapt to the situation as it developed.

They spoke of a few other things; the upcoming trip, whether James had begun learning of Magic, James's other observances of the area. After all that was said and done, the Major congratulated James on staying resilient, and assured James that they would do what they could about his ammo problem ASAP.

James hit the phone's screen lock button and walked over to the stables, it was already dark and he was tired.

It had been a long day. Brushing Steve's fur had taken nearly two hours. Plus there was that whole thing with the princess. Then there had been

dinner with Kela's family. Once again it was a nice dinner, some kind of fish with a nice berry salad. James had given Jurl a list of ingredients to get the next time he came over, and promised to cook a meal from back home. The children had been excited to learn of another world's food.

He stopped at the stables to see Steve, grabbing one of the feed goats and leading it into Steve's enclosure. He gave the drake some neck scritches and then left the giant monster to its dinner.

As he headed into the main castle, and up to his room, he couldn't help but think of how bizarre his life had become. He'd engaged in spy-novel-espionage-flirting with an armored princess while talking about guns. He'd helped clean a massive fire breathing lizard named Steve. He'd had dinner with a family of werewolves, and even planned to cook cheeseburgers for them the next time. Then he'd briefed a Major in a different universe on his situation, while speaking Korean no less. And in a few days he was about to go on a D&D style quest to try to figure out how to save the world.

What had his life become?

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When James arrived at his room he found a package awaiting him outside the door. He took it inside, past Kela's room and into his. He placed it on one of the small tables and opened it.

Inside was a book and a pair of what looked like opera glasses. The glasses were a little bulky and the lenses were blue. The book had a red leather cover and a small yellow gem, it looked like amber, layed into the front cover. When he opened it he saw some of the characters that he had seen all over the castle and in other books and scrolls that he had handled since he'd gotten here. As usual he couldn't understand them. Oddly though they were only on the left hand, or back side, pages. pages on the right side of the book were blank.

Then he looked through the glasses and suddenly realized what they were. As he held them to his eyes he felt them grow warm for just a moment, and he felt the medallion hanging at his neck vibrate for just a moment, shaking on his chest. After a moment the symbols on the page shifted and transformed, slowly turning into the letters of the alphabet and forming words that he actually understood.

As he read the words he suddenly understood what the book and glasses were for.

Hello Specialist James Choi.

*This book and these glasses have been created through magic and enchantment to help us better understand each other, and by "US" we mean both you, and your people. The glasses work in tandem with your Hero's Medallion to translate our language into one you understand. Throughout this book, including this page itself, please read the messages and phrases we have written here with the glasses. Then, once you've read

them, please remove the glasses and write a copy of the text onto the other page in your own language. Once the book has been completed it will seal itself and transform into a pair of stone runes. Once you have these runes please report to one of the two high mages and we will help you use them to better our mutual understanding of each other's world languages.*

Thank you ahead of time. -High Mage Veliry

Also, congratulations on bonding with Steve.

James turned the page, just to make sure that the glasses did what the page said they would. He saw a page of writing about a farmer and his animals, almost like a child's nursery rhyme or something. He lowered the glasses and the words immediately shifted back to their normal incomprehensible gibberish. He raised the glasses up again, felt the warmth and the vibration of the glasses and medallion, and watched them slowly morph into English again.

Cool. He thought. *Guess they're working on a sort of magical Rosetta stone. I'll have to tell the brass.*

He pulled out his phone and wrote a quick text to the major informing him of the new development. After a few minutes the phone buzzed, a simple acknowledgment and a green light to do what the book said, within reason.

James scoffed at that. He was going to complete the book either way. He needed to know what was written in the world around him and this was the first step to that. He was a little annoyed that the higher ups still thought he needed their permission for stuff like this. What were they gonna do, court marshal him for learning this world's version of the ABC's? He had a feeling that they still thought of him as a young dumb soldier, not trustworthy enough to have a toaster in his barracks.

Joke's on them. He thought. *I've got a toaster and a hot plate in my room, and my roommate has a damn pressure cooker.* Though he did have to admit, his roommate was dumb enough that that was probably a bad idea.

He resolved to begin working on the book in the morning. Though he did try using the glasses on some of the books Kela had in her room. It didn't work though. Apparently they were designed only to work with the book they'd come with.

Eh, worth a shot. He thought. He headed to the bathes and prepared to go to bed for the night. As he bathed he also came to the conclusion that he should also learn the spoken language of this world. He couldn't rely on the medallion to translate for him forever. That had almost backfired when Kela had come to his rescue with Steve.

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Princess Amina was upset at Veliry.

She'd warned the short redhead to not tinker with the rest of the Sergeant's pistol when she'd left earlier.

Yet only a few hours later the mage had reported to her chambers, requesting authorization to retrieve another of the pistol's projectiles from the rectangle. Her face was singed black, and most of her eyebrows were missing.

"What the hell happened?" Amina asked before the mage could even begin speaking.

"I managed to disassemble the projectile." Veliry started.

"Well that's good. But why are you all burnt up?"

"Well, I managed to retrieve the chemical powder compound inside the brass sleeve. It was some kind of flaky black substance." She said. "And I was on the verge of obtaining the remaining chemical compound. It was a little silver button pressed into the bottom of the brass sleeve. The powder was floating in the levitation field when I did."

"And....?" Amina prompted.

"Well, the little silver button was rather stubborn about coming out. I had to pull very hard with my telekinesis." The mage was clearly upset with herself. "Before I realized it the little silver button exploded." When Veliry saw Amina's eyes widen she continued. "It wasn't a big explosion. Just a little pop and some sparks, it would've just made me jump under other circumstances."

"Then what happened? How did a 'little pop' cause all of this?" Amina said while gesturing at the mage's face.

"Well." Veliry continued. "Like I said, the black powder was floating near by." She paused, holding her hand to her right ear. "Sorry, my ears have been ringing ever since. Anyways, the button made a spark when it popped. The spark hit the black powder. And the black powder made a rather large bang and a small fireball. Hence, my now missing eye brows."

Amina thought about what this could mean. She also felt pity on the poor mage. It seemed it was just bad luck and poor understanding of the other world's technology that had caused her now poor appearance.

"Do you think that's what caused the weapon to make such a loud noise?" She asked.

"That was my conclusion. I also did some calculations based on the new information."

"And?"

"Well. I'd need to deconstruct the pistol that's in the lab to confirm. But an explosion like that. If it's in a tightly compact space, say one made of steel or some other super hard metal." She said, pausing to figure out her wording. "Well. The explosion would do what it can to

escape that device. If something were in it's way. Like, say, a small piece of lead wrapped in copper....."

Amina thought. "It would move that copper and lead item out of its way. Very quickly."

Veliry nodded. "Like I said. I would need to disassemble the other pistol to confirm that that's what is happening."

Amina considered this. She had a feeling that that was a bad idea. But she didn't know why.

"No." She said, she used a tone that she hoped would not implore Veliry to question this. She saw the mage considering doing so anyways, but after a moment Veliry simply nodded. "No, bring the pistol to me. I'll get you another one of the projectiles from it. But.... I think I have a better idea."

"Yes princess. Sorry about the trouble." Veliry said, bowing a little.

"No need for that Vel. It was just an honest mistake." Amina replied. "Go get those burns taken care of, then grab the pistol for me."

With that Veliry turned and left. As she did and while the door was still open Amina called to one of the guards that was permanently posted in the hall outside. When he arrived she gave him orders.

"Please go fetch a few servants. Grab one of the serving trolleys and use it to bring the remaining gear from the Hero's Sergeant to me. I need them for something. If anyone questions you, tell them it's an order from me. Same for my father. He can come ask me if he needs to know."

The guard nodded and left to carry the order out. She was about to gamble with items that she knew her father wouldn't want her gambling with. But she had a plan.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (37/?)

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Writer's note: Espionage baby. It's a thing. I'm not gonna tell you what A.P.G. is, either you know or you don't. Also the SSN Walters is not a thing IRL (Or it could be, idk. Subs are super secret squirrel status and I'm not a navy guy.)

As always, enjoy.

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After James was done brushing Steve, and after he was done trying to get his head back on straight, he and Kela went back to their quarters. Kela packed a small bag and James simply changed into normal, non uniform, clothes.

Kela had finally, fully, healed her legs. On top of that it was her weekend. So they were planning on having dinner with Jurl and the children. James would return to the castle afterwards, though Kela insisted that he could stay if he wanted. But he had to 'touch base' as he called it, with the colonel. He'd gone too long without calling them, having only sent a handful of text messages since the last conversation with the king. She understood.

As they were walking through the town they discussed many things. Kela wanted to talk about James and the Princess. James did not. Kela joked about how red both of them had turned when the princess had grabbed his hands. James chose not to mention the obvious attempt at information gathering.

James changed the subject and told Kela that he'd noticed her shift back to human form. She'd grown shorter by at least a few inches. Her ears had gotten smaller, and seemed lower to him. He also noted that the hair on her head seemed longer and lighter, Kela admitted that in human form she was blonde, so that made sense. She also said that the injury to her legs had likely caused the shortness, since the regenerative process occurred during her shifting process.

They spoke of James's new drake mount. James was curious about Kela and Steve's hostility towards each other. Kela admitted that she really didn't care about what Steve had done, since it had just been his nature. But she also admitted that her animal instincts put her on edge around him as a result of them. As for Steve, she imagined he likely still held a grudge with her for what she'd done to his shoulder, as well as the fact that she'd survived his flame attack. Apparently surviving that was not a common occurrence, and likely upset Steve's pride. Or at least that was her theory.

They also talked about the upcoming trip to see the nearest example of the Vanishing Blight that James had been summoned to help with. After the weekend was over, James, Kela, Princess Amina, Mage Veliry, and if he was able Prince Artair would be traveling for nearly a week to see a section of the world that had been affected by it. Gixelle would accompany them for the first part of the trip, but once they arrived and had done what they came to do, she would depart back to where she'd been before the Clan had summoned her for James's initation. Apparently it was past where they were going.

About this trip, James was both excited and stressed. On the one hand, he would finally be venturing out into the wider world and seeing more of its people and places. They were expected to hit several small villages and one coastal port city before getting there. James was excited to see

them. But they were also finally addressing what had caused James's life to be completely derailed and thrown into a completely different world. And he still didn't know how he felt about that.

As Kela and Jurgen's house came into view, James could smell something delicious and familiar. He could have been wrong but he thought it might have been apple pie. When they got into Kela's yard James prepared himself. He'd been blindsided by Kela's children last time, and he was determined not to be this time.

Sure enough, one of the little furballs tried to tackle him again. But James was prepared, and caught the child mid tackle. He grabbed them by the shoulder and rolled with the impact. As he did, he kicked his foot out and sent the little were-pup flying through the air behind him, at least a good ten feet high, and about ten yards far. The little wolf giggled as they flew, and James was pleasantly surprised to find that it wasn't Mela that had attacked him, but Tilo. He was happy to see the shy little wolf opening up a bit. Tilo landed on his feet, slid a few feet, then sprinted back towards James yelling, "Again, again!".

James obliged him. He had a feeling, that it was going to be a nice night.

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In the mage's lab Princess Amina stood behind high mage Veliry.

In front of them, floating just above Veliry's work table, was a pistol that looked just like the one James had shown her. The high mage was using magic to examine it.

"He said five to six hundred miles per hour?" Veliry asked incredulously. A quill floated next to a notebook and wrote for her as she examined the pistol.

"Yes." She pointed at the bottom of the pistol's handle. "He popped something out of there. When he did the handle became hollow. That's where the pistol kept its projectiles.

Veliry tried pulling on the magazine, but it held firm. She tried using her magic to tug on it, but stopped when her senses said she might be pulling beyond the material's integrity threshold.

"Hmmm." Veliry said as she strained. "It's not budging. I can feel that it's a separate component. Or rather, several components." She tried again, from a different angle, but met the same results. "But it's not moving."

"Can I try?" Amina asked as she reached for the pistol.

"Sure." Veliry waved her hand and the pistol floated towards Amina's.

Amina grabbed it, holding it by the grip and trying to remember what James had done when he'd pulled out the magazine earlier. She held it up,

and grabbed the bottom of the magazine with her fingers. She tried pulling and felt it move, jiggling just a little bit, but it held fast.

Veliry approached, watching curiously. She was examining the pistol while Amina held it, and she was about to look at the front of it when Amina pointed it at the ceiling. Amina held her left hand out and stopped the mage.

"What?" Veliry asked.

"When he showed it to me, I almost pointed this end," She gestured at the end of the barrel. "at my face. He was very adamant that I should never do that. He said to always treat these as if they're loaded. This is the end that the fire and the loud sound came from, and the end that he was pointing at Artair when he fought him. As such, I feel inclined to heed that warning."

It was as she was saying this, Veliry's eyes widening, that Amina felt something on the grip that moved. She looked at it and noticed a little nob with a criss-cross pattern cut into it. She touched the nob and found that it actually depressed slightly, it was actually a button. She pressed it, and when she did the magazine ejected quite quickly and fell to the ground.

The two of them jumped back when it did. It had startled them, and they both still remembered the damage the other pistol had done to Artair's knee. After a moment, when they realized that the small rectangular piece of metal hadn't done anything, they approached it. Amina kneeled down and picked it up.

"This." She said, holding it up for Veliry to see. "Is what he said made the pistol dangerous." She looked at it close and saw what she was looking for. She placed her thumb on the bullet and slid it out sideways, it ejected neatly into Veliry's waiting palm. "That, is what it fires. He called it 'his worlds version of the arrow'."

Veliry looked at the small piece of brass and copper with amazement. She put a green monocle in her right eye and examined it closely, the monocle glowed a little once she did.

"A brass sleeve on one end, and a copper sleeve over a piece of lead. Plus some kind of chemical powder component, and a small button with a different chemical compound in it." She said as she turned the small item in her hand. "And this thing travels at over five hundred miles per hour? How?" She asked.

Amina was about to say that it was the mage's job to find out, preferably before the trip north. But Veliry was already moving over to her work table again, muttering to herself. Amina looked down at the pistol and magazine in her hands. She slotted the magazine back in its hole and tried to pull the slide back like she'd seen James do. But it wouldn't budge. She tried again but to no avail.

She walked over to Veliry and interrupted the tiny woman's train of thought.

"Do what you can with that one." She placed the pistol back in the levitation field. "But do not go any further with this. I want this as intact as it can be. Understood?"

Veliry looked up at her confused. "But I need to study it more."

"And you will. But I'm going to see if I can learn more from James himself. And like I said, I want this one kept intact."

"Yes Princess." Veliry said with a hint of disappointment.

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Colonel Muhammed stepped off the airplane and began walking towards the awaiting SUV.

It was a cold night, and there was still snow on the ground. She pulled the collar of her fleece jacket up higher. She hated being in Maryland.

When she got into the SUV Captain John Estelle was waiting for her. He handed her a cup of coffee from Starbucks and waited as she situated herself and took a drink.

"How are things John?" She asked after she'd swallowed the warm, but still disappointing coffee.

"They're going well ma'am." He replied. "A.P.G.'s techs have gone over the notes that your guys sent over. They believe that they'll have it set up within the next two to three days."

"Good. How's the power setup?"

"Good, the PG lab has it's own standalone grid. Plus we've brought in the S.S.N. Walters just off the coast. They're running a line to it now, in case we need a backup source on the fly." He said, handing her a folder with the details in it.

"Can the Walters keep up with that kind of draw?" She asked as she opened up the folder.

"Not for long." He admitted. "The techs estimate that it could handle it for ten minutes, give or take. They say that if the main grid isn't back up by then, then we've got bigger problems."

"Hmmm" She looked through the folder. Everything seemed in order. "How 'bout our candidate? Have you found me some decent options?"

"Of course ma'am. He opened his briefcase up and pulled six brown folders out. He handed them to her. "Naturally, most of them are members of the Seals. But we do have one Green Beret, One marine sniper, and one," He held up the fourth folder for her to see. "member of the Secret Service.

No currently attached families. No infectious diseases or viruses or anything else. All highly experienced at covert operations."

She took the folders and leafed through the first few lightly. "Good. I'll check these out in the morning. I'm jet-lagged as hell. Let's get me to whatever shit-hole they've put me up in this time."

"Yes ma'am." He replied. He knocked on the side of his door and the SUV began driving.

As it began moving, the colonel received a message on her phone. Specialist Choi had called the base in California.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (36/?)

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Writer's note: Someone throw on some Barry White!

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It was a lovely day. The sun was shining bright, the sky was a nice bright blue, the rings around the planet were glinting as the sun shone off of what James presumed was ice. It was warm enough to wear just his shirt, but cool enough that he wasn't sweating either.

Between that and his recent successes James felt pretty good as he sat on top of Steve, slowly brushing the fur of the drake's mane with a massive brush with huge spikes coming out of it.

Steve was being housed in a special wing of the Castle stables. The wing was designed for the larger and more dangerous mounts that castle guests rode. Steve's pen was entirely enclosed on the sides, but had openings big enough for him on the back. It reminded James of the cave that Steve had dug out for himself as a lair. The big difference was the lack of carcasses everywhere, and as a result a better smell. It also had a large pool full of fine white sand that Steve had immediately dove into and started rolling around in. Thankfully this had helped reduce Steve's odor greatly.

While James brushed Steve's mane, Kela waited outside the pen, on the inside of the main stable building. She and Steve, it seemed, did not care for each other. Upon smelling her again, Steve had puffed up his neck. Likewise, the fur on Kela's head and down her back had seemed to raise up as well, and her claws had flexed over and over again. If it hadn't been for the metal bars separating them, James thought they might

have fought again. So she'd gone off and sat on a stool, out of Steve's sight, and began reading a book.

James was amazed at the variety of creatures in the so called "Exotic Creature Stable". He'd seen several other dragon kin. There had been something that looked like a mixture of a rhino and a hyena. There was another pen that had a horse that looked as though it was made of seaweed. This one had had red ribbons tied to the bars of its pen. When James had approached to examine it one of the stable hands had stopped him. There were five different gryphons, two of which had looked like the classic eagle-lion mixture. But one had looked like a vulture mixed with a black panther, and the last two had looked like owls with the bodies of snow leopards. As cool as those had been, James hated flying. He was totally okay with riding Steve, on the ground, where people belonged.

As James continued cleaning Steve, he heard a bit of a commotion outside the pen. He listened for a moment and realized that it was Kela speaking to someone. He thought he recognized the voice, and after a few minutes the Princess appeared outside Steve's gate.

James pretended not to notice her, and continued working on Steve. But naturally Steve turned towards the princess, curious about her arrival. James looked up.

"Oh hey, how's it going Princess." James greeted her.

"Good afternoon. Can we talk?"

James sat up, resting his hands on Steve's back. "Uh, I guess. What's going on?"

The princess shifted a little. "Can you come down?"

James looked around for a bit, then swung his right leg over Steve's back and slid down the massive drake's side. Steve turned to regard him, and James gave his nose a pat, and scratched under the straps of Steve's muzzle. He walked over to the gate and stepped out.

"Everything alright?" He asked as he pulled some of Steve's fur off of his clothes.

"Yes." She responded. "I simply wished to congratulate you on your victory against my brother."

"Oh." James said as he stood back up from cleaning himself. "Uh, thanks."

"I also wanted to say that I found your fight most impressive." The princess added. "I was told that you didn't have any extensive training with a sword. But you handled yourself well."

James 's eyebrows furrowed. "Uuuh, thanks.... again?"

"I was curious though." Amina said.

"Oh?"

"Can I know more about that weapon you used?" She asked.

James suddenly understood that this was what she was really here for. He wondered how much he should tell her.

"You mean my pistol?" He asked.

"Is that what it's called. I thought you called it a.... Sig Sour?"

"Well. That's the company that makes it. But it's part of a family of weapons known as pistols." He clarified.

"I see. May I see it?"

James looked around. A few of the stable hands were at the far end of the building, moving some crates. Kela was relaxing on a stool about twenty yards away watching the two of them intently. James knew she could hear everything they were saying. He weighed his options and had the thought that it was somewhat inevitable that this would happen anyways.

He drew the pistol from it's holster in one swift motion. The princess jumped a little. Her hand reached for her sword, but stopped about halfway. James ejected the magazine. Then he cleared the chamber, catching the chambered round as it popped out. He pressed it back into the magazine and put the magazine in his pocket. Then he held the pistol out, grip first, to the princess.

She looked at it. Then she looked back at him. Her hand reached for it, but then pulled back.

"Is it... is it safe?" She asked, unsure.

"About as safe as it ever will be." He said. "Those things I pulled out of it were what makes it dangerous." He held it up a bit more, gesturing for her to take it. After a moment's hesitation, she did.

"It's so light." She said. She held the pistol up, looking at it intently. She was about to look down the barrel when James quickly grabbed her wrist, halting the motion. "Ow!" She exclaimed, shocked at the grab.

"Sorry." He said. "Just, little rule; never point that part at yourself. Or anything you don't want to kill for that matter." As he said this he pulled the pistol away from her face. "Even unloaded, you always treat these like they are loaded. Okay?" He let go of her.

She looked at him when he said this. Then she looked back at the pistol. She nodded her head. "I.... understand." She said. She looked back at the pistol. "So, how does it work?"

"Well." James said. "Right now it wouldn't. You could use it as a makeshift club if you needed to." He swung his right hand in the classic

pistol whip strike. "But it's not ideal for it." He pulled the magazine out of his pocket again. "This is what makes it really dangerous."

She looked at the magazine with awe. How could such a small thing could make something dangerous. But she thought about what she'd seen happen to her brother, and what she knew had happened to Kela.

"What does that do for it? I still don't understand how this works." She admitted.

James pulled the first round out of the magazine again. Should he really tell the princess how these worked? He still wasn't sure. He figured he could go halfway. But he wouldn't explain everything.

"You guys have bow and arrows." He said. "And I've seen catapults and ballista up on the walls."

The princess nodded. "Yes, of course."

"So you know how bows fire arrows? Ballista fire bolts, or whatever? And catapults throw rocks, or firebombs or whatever else?"

Again she nodded. "Yes."

He held the bullet up in front of her. "Meet my world's version of the arrow." He shrugged. "It just moves a lot faster."

She reached out to grab the bullet. But James pulled it back before she could.

"Nuh uh." He said. "If you want to hold this, then I'm gonna need that back." He gestured to the pistol.

The princess looked at the pistol in surprise. For a moment she'd forgotten she was holding it. The grip was so comfortable in her hand. She held it up, then turned it around and offered the grip to James. He took it, and held the bullet out for her.

"It's so small, and light." She said. She was amazed that something that small and seemingly innocent could do the damage that she had seen on her brother's knee. Or that they could temporarily kill a werewolf like Kela, while she was fully armored no less.

"Yeah." James admitted. "But when they're fired they travel at a few hundred miles per hour. So fast that you can't even see them.

"Hundreds of miles an hour?" She asked incredulously.

"Yeah. I think it's like, five or six hundred miles an hour. Or something along those lines." He said.

She looked back at the small piece of metal in her hand, and suddenly the injury to her brother's knee made more sense. Nothing in this world moved that fast. Or at least, nothing had, until James had shown up.

"How.....How does it move that fast?" She asked.

"Eeeh. I don't think I can tell you that." He said, cringing as he did. "At least not without authorization from my O.I.C."

"What's an O.I.C.?" She asked.

"Oh, uh Officer In Charge. Basically your commanding officer. For me, right now, that's the colonel." He pointed past Amina at Kela, whose ears raised at the gesture. "For Kela, that'd be you.

"Oh, I see." She said.

"Exactly." He said, laughing a little.

She thought for a moment, before realizing what she'd said. She covered her mouth and chuckled a little, and she tried not to blush.

She handed the bullet back to him, wary of the small item's unexpected lethality. He took it back and put it back in the magazine, then he slid the magazine into the pistol, and put the pistol back into the holster. She looked at the holster, realizing that it was basically the pistol's version of a sheath. Just like the one for her sword or dagger.

"Could.... Could you show me how to use it some time?" She asked hesitantly. This was partly because she needed to learn more about the weapon. But she couldn't deny her curiosity about the pistol. What did something that deadly feel like when you used it?

James rubbed his neck a bit. "Well, I think I'd have to ask about that too." He admitted. "Plus. I don't have a lot of ammo left for it."

He neglected to tell her that he only had six real bullets left in his magazine. He didn't have Sergeant Odie's magazines. Not yet anyways. All he had beside that, was two and a half magazines of the rubber rounds. Plus he still wasn't sure about whether or not he should be telling her any of this.

"Would you please?" She asked, just a hint of a begging tone. "I'd really like to know more about it."

For whatever reason that threw up red flags in James's mind.

"I...." He started. "I can ask."

She grabbed his hands and held them in hers, in front of them. "Thank you so much!" She said excitedly. James flinched back a bit at the sudden enthusiasm from the princess. Then she seemed to realize what she'd done and she quickly let go as both of them began blushing heavily.

James didn't notice Kela grinning behind the princess.

"Um." He began to say. "Like I said, I have to ask first. No guarantees."

"I understand. Thank you." She said. "By the way, thank you for humbling my brother. He needed it."

"Yeah." James said, glad at the change of subject. "We uh... we kinda worked things out. At least I think we have an understanding, he and I."

"Well that's good." She replied. "Well I'll let you get back to your grooming. Have a nice day James." with that the princess turned and began to walk away.

James didn't know why, well he did but he didn't want to admit it, but he liked the way she said his name.

"Yeah." He said, trying to think straight. "You have a nice day too, Princess." And after a moment of trying to make his brain work again he went back through the door into Steve's pen.

When James turned around Steve was staring at him intently.

"Oh, don't look at me like that bud. I have no idea what's going on either."

Steve just huffed a little and lowered his head so James could reach his mane again.

"Yeah, yeah, back to work." He said.

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Princess Amina had a lot on her mind as she passed Kela. She made a point of ignoring the captain's smirk as she did so.

She needed to know more about that pistol. How could something so small and light make something else even smaller and lighter move at five to six hundred miles per hour. The mages had said there was no magic involved, it shouldn't have been possible.

She wanted to use it for herself and see if that revealed anything. But James seemed hesitant to let her do so. She had a feeling that he was holding back. He'd also insisted on asking for permission first, that part she at least understood. She was a soldier too, and a general no less. She understood how rank structure worked.

She also thought of the other bigger pistol, the rifle as he'd called it, that the mages had found in James's vehicle. If the small hand held one he had could accelerate its ammunition to over five hundred miles per hour, than how fast could the large one make them move. She feared what she might see if they ever got that one to fire.

Most of all she was confused as to why she'd gotten so excited at the notion of him letting her shoot the pistol. She'd grabbed his hands for gods sakes. And why had she blushed so hard afterwards? Why did she feel so hot, even now as she walked away?

She'd hated him when she'd first heard that he had taken Kela from her pack. She also hadn't understood why he was the one the gods had summoned. Yet time and time again the diminutive little man had proven himself more than capable of handling anything thrown at him. She disliked it, but she'd had no choice but to admit that he had impressed her several times now.

It was a lot to think about. And Kela's smirk as she'd walked past hadn't helped any. Damned wolf was always too smart. It frustrated Amina that her friend was so perceptive of absolutely everything.

The princess continued walking. She needed to speak with her father.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (35/?)

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Writer's note: as is usual after an action heavy chapter, this one is filler-ish. And as much as you guys may dislike the prince, he's still important. Deal with it.

\~

James sat on a chair in front of a table. Sitting on the table in front of him were a bunch of metal and composite parts, and the components of a field weapon cleaning kit.

It was a simple kit, just a bore snake, some good old fashioned C.L.P., and a small multitool, the whole thing was in a pouch that doubled as a cleaning cloth. The pouch was stained from years of being used, then cleaned, then used and cleaned again. It wasn't his cleaning kit of choice, but it was all he had.

He sat, lightly scrubbing out the slide of the pistol intently. He'd done it a million times before. He could practically do it blindfolded. But the whole exercise had always been calming to him. When he was done getting the gunk out of the slide, he sprayed a light spritz of C.L.P. on it and set it down. Then he moved on to the spring and its guide rod.

A few feet from where he sat cleaning his weapon, was a bed. In the bed, Prince Artair rested, still recovering from the injuries that James had dealt him. His left arm was in a sling, resting on his stomach. The sling was cut out so that it wouldn't touch the heavily bandaged elbow. His right leg was wrapped from thigh to foot in a bandage that softly glowed green.

As James neared the end of the cleaning ritual the prince stirred, and opened an eye. He looked around for a moment, and jolted up a bit when he saw James. But the jolt must've hurt him somewhere, because he groaned and fell back.

James finished wiping down the last few pieces, quickly reassembled the weapon, and put it back in his belt holster. Then he tucked all the cleaning supplies back into their bag, and set them on the table. He leaned back in the chair and sat with his hands on the arms, waiting.

After a minute of adjusting his position the prince settled, then he looked at James with an angry glare.

"What do you want?" Artair asked.

"To settle things up." James replied simply.

"What's to settle? You won, I'm your trainer now."

"Exactly." James said. "You and I are gonna be seeing a lot of each other from now on. We need to at least be on decent terms."

"How can I be? You've made me a damn cripple!" The prince half yelled.

"Not if the healers are doing what I told em to I didn't" James said nonchalantly. "But then again, I don't know how any of that stuff works."

"But you said 'minimal magical aid'?"

"Yeah, but I asked the king not to let you be hobbled. Honestly, on my world you would have probably lost the leg. At least with how I hit you. That big green bandage, and the fact that you do seem to have a leg, implies that they probably patched that up." James replied

"Why help me like that?"

"Because like I said; I wanna settle things up." James reiterated.

"You embarrassed me in front of half the damn castle staff." Artair stated, sullenly.

"And if I hadn't shot you, would you have done any different to me? At least I wasn't aiming for your banishment. Dick." James said as he sat up and leaned forward in the chair. "I know damn well that you were playing with me out there."

The prince considered this, then looked away. "Yeah, I guess that's fair." He said, while looking at the wall.

"Look." James continued. "I don't know why you dislike me so much. And I'm sorry if I was an asshole while I was drunk." James waved to get the prince to look at him. "But. I. WAS. DRUNK. Okay? Either way, I apologize."

The prince just continued glaring at him.

After a moment James just threw up his hands and sat back. "Look, that's all you're getting from me. Way I see it, we're even now." James Stood up, grabbed the cleaning kit and began walking for the door.

^("Fine, we're even.") The prince mumbled.

James turned back. "What was that?"

The prince's jaw clenched for a moment. "I said, 'fine, we're even' dammit."

James smirked a bit. "Was that so hard?" James jammed the bag with the cleaning kit into one of his cargo pockets. He walked over to the pitcher of water sitting on the nearby dresser. He poured two cups, grabbed them both, and handed one to the prince. "You're probably thirsty. You've been out for a whole day."

The prince reluctantly took the offered cup and swallowed the contents in a single gulp. "Thanks." He said quietly.

James finished swallowing a bit of the water. "No problem." He leaned against the dresser. "I really don't want us to be enemies or anything man."

The prince didn't say anything. Why was this out-worlder being so nice? So honest? He'd been cold blooded and cocky in the ring. The prince didn't know what to think.

"You're son of the king." James continued. "The brother of a princess that already hates me. Kela seems to have some kind of history with you. She seems to really dislike you, I don't know what that's about. And now," James said as he pulled up his pant leg and showed his clan tattoo. "we're part of the same motorcycle gang."

"A what?" The prince asked, confused.

"Just a joke, don't worry about it." James said, smiling. "But you're also about to teach me about training Steve." James said.

"What's that name anyways?" The prince interrupted. "Never heard a name like *Steve* before."

James chuckled a little. "And I've never heard of a name like *Artair,* or Kela, or Amina, or Xhalya. It's just a random Earth name honestly." He admitted.

"There's no deeper meaning? It's not some great warrior or something?"

"Eeeeh." James moaned. "There's a few famous Steve's on my world. But I just picked a name at random honestly."

The prince shook his head at that, how ridiculous.

"Oh. What, is Xhalya someone important in this world?" James asked.

The prince looked at him seriously for a moment. "My mother's name was Aria Xhalyanna Petravius. It's part of her family name." He said, and shook his head. "And three hundred or so years ago her ancestor Xhayl slew a rabid fire elemental and saved their city, so it's a hero's name too."

James cringed at his own stupidity. Of course it was an important name. God he was dumb sometimes.

"Sorry. I was just trying to joke. I didn't mean anything by it." He said, looking down.

"It's fine."

"I just-" James tried to say.

"I said it's fine." The prince repeated. "Not remembering that you don't know anything about our world, was how I got myself here. Let's just pretend you never said that."

James nodded, drank some more water. "Thanks."

The two of them sat in awkward silence for a moment. Then the prince spoke.

"You rode him fairly well. He seemed to be listening to you."

"Yeah. He's uh, he seems pretty smart." James admitted.

"Variants usually are. How soft is that fur? You didn't seem to be walking funny when you got off?" Artair asked.

"Dude. Super soft. My arms were sorer than my legs."

"Nice. I've heard that bristle neck fur is incredibly comfortable." The prince said. "By the way, what's a 'dude'?"

James thought for a minute. He hadn't expected that question. "I... honestly don't know. I know in my world it used to have some kind of meaning. I think it meant you were fancy or something. But in my time, it's just a casual term for a person, any person, really."

"Huh. Weird." The prince replied. "By the way, did you have sex with my sister?"

James had been in the middle of drinking more of the water. The sudden surprise attack of a question caused him to choke a bit, and spit the water back into the cup. He coughed a minute.

"I can't say I'd blame you. But it is a surprise, usually she's into taller men." The prince added.

"No!" James interrupted. "God, no. Why does everyone think that?"

"Oh it's just the way you two were-"

James pulled his phone out of his pocket. "Oh look!" He exclaimed, hitting the power button on the side so the screen would light up. "My commander's calling. Gotta go!" He quickly retreated out of the room. Hoping that the prince's lack of knowledge about his phone would be convincing enough.

In the bed the prince just shook his head.

"I think I fucking hate that guy. That *dude*...." He said to himself and then chuckled. He went to take a drink from the cup, then remembered that it was empty. He looked at the pitcher on the dresser across the room. Then down at his bandaged leg.

"Dammit." He said to nobody.

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In the King's chambers the king spoke with Amina and a few of his other advisors.

"You're sure that that thing isn't magical?" He asked.

"It isn't." Amina assured him. "Both of the mages went over it about a thousand times when he requested it. So did Gixelle's mage. They both said that it was solely mechanical and chemical in nature."

"He mentioned something called a rifle. Said it was a bigger version. Was one of those in that contraption he came in?"

Amina signaled to one of her aides. They came forth holding a bundle of cloth. When she reached for it, they unfolded the cloth. Inside was something very similar to James's pistol, but it was indeed significantly larger, and heavier. It also had some kind of hose coming off of its handle.

"His didn't have this hose thing on it. What is this?" The king asked curiously.

"The mages are still figuring that out. They said it was attached to the vehicle." Amina answered. "They think it might have been powered by the vehicle."

"If so...." The King thought out loud. "If so than it must be significantly more powerful."

"That was their deduction as well." Amina agreed.

"And every one of their soldiers is trained to use these?"

"I would assume so." She admitted.

The King looked at her seriously. "If so, then I fear what might happen if they ever get through the door." He placed a hand on her shoulder. "I need you to learn more about these from him."

She looked him in the eyes, blushing slightly. "Yes father. I will."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (34/?)

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Writer's note: Welcome back from the long weekend my dudes. We're starting off this week with a bang or two (or more, but who's keeping count), also some pay back. And yes, I've played fast and loose with guns in this one, chill idc.

\~

James stood at the table, testing the feel and the weight of the weapons before him. There were swords, axes, hammers, spears, and all other manner of medieval weaponry in front of him. Plus some stuff he didn't recognize that he imagined was unique to this world.

He didn't have a lot of experience with any of this though. Other than knives, batons, and maybe staffs he didn't know how to use any of them. Even with those his experience mainly came from combatives training, and a pugils fight he and his buddies had had when cleaning out an old conex.

But in terms of practical experience? Well, he didn't really have any.

He was standing in the training yard of the castle. He was wearing his full uniform, and the green medallion. Kela had insisted that he wear armor, or at least the breastplate over his uniform. But he had forgone all of that. For whatever reason he had wanted this to be as simple, and official as possible. So full uniform was the name of the game. But he had opted to wear his IOTBS.

Standing on the opposite side of him, wearing simple pants, shirt, a breastplate, greaves, and gauntlets, was Prince Artair. He was test swinging a pair of scimitars.

"This is bold, hero!" The prince said from where he was. "Do you even know how to use any of those?"

James ignored him. He opted to grab a short sword and a small shield, but he grabbed something else too. It had been put on the table at his

request. He turned toward the prince, tightening the shield's strap on his arm, and test swinging the sword.

"Seriously, you have no idea what you're doing with that. And what is this weird cloth thing you're wearing? It's all puffy. Will that even stop anything?"

James remained silent.

From the balcony overlooking the courtyard the king spoke to the crowd surrounding the small fighting ring. Gixelle stood to his left, fully armored and sword on her back. Amina stood to his right, also fully armed and armored.

"A week ago." He began. "My son, Prince Artair Petravius, second born of the royal family, and member of Clan Drakrid. Began a challenge with the summoned hero of the God's Door." The crowd murmured, most of them knew this, but didn't know James by sight and so didn't know he was the hero. The king continued. "He did this while the hero was drunk in mourning for a dead comrade. He did it poorly, and nearly got the hero killed in the process." The crowd murmured some more. "Despite this the Hero not only survived, but succeeded in the challenge, and is now a member of Clan Drakrid himself." The king paused as the murmurs started up again. "Because the hero was not killed. And...because I am his father. The prince's life is spared." No murmurs this time, just silence. "I had planned to have him flogged. But the regional Clan Leader," He gestured at Gixelle. "suggested that we let the hero choose the prince's fate. He has chosen, and I'm sure you've already guessed it by now, TRIAL BY SINGLE COMBAT!" He paused again. "The victor shall determine the fate of the defeated. As is custom in this mode of trial."

James and Artair stood facing each other. Artair was grinning. James just looked at him with a blank expression.

This time Gixelle spoke, stepping forward as she did. "There are only two ways this trial ends.Either one of the combatants admits defeat, due to mutual agreement, pain, or the inability to continue fighting." She paused. "Or Death." She let it sink in.

James and Artair continued staring. Artair looked somewhat confused at James's lack of emotion, or reaction to Gixelle's last statement. She began again.

"The combatants have been allowed to choose their dress and armor, and use any weapon of their choice. The only limitation being that none of it be magical in nature. Mages have confirmed this, and the only magic in that ring right now is the Clan Drakrid crest that each man wears on their flesh, which has no baring on this fight." With this, Gixelle stepped back.

The king spoke again. "Let all who stand here today give witness to the honesty of this trial and its participants. Now before they begin let us hear their chosen fate, should they be the victors." He pointed at Artair. "Prince Artair, what will be your victory?"

"My freedom, of course. And that the hero be banished!" The crowd gasped, and for just a moment the king's face betrayed a bit of anger.

"Witnessed." The king said. The crowd repeated it in unison. "Specialist Choi, your victory?"

"That the prince heal from his wounds with minimal magical aid, and that he serves as my trainer in regards to Drake riding, enforced by the Clan mother Gixelle!"

The king nodded, and beside him Gixelle smiled a little. "Witnessed!" The crowd repeated it again.

Behind James, just outside the ring, Kela whispered to James. ^("Remember. He'll charge quickly. He'll try to surprise you. Keep your eyes on his feet.") James nodded subtly.

"Then if everything is prepared." The king said. **"FIGHT!"**

That was it, and sure enough the prince charged, and fast.

James fell back on his army training. When someone tries to surprise attack you, attack them back. Break through the surprise with one of your own.

James charged the prince, shield raised, sword behind him. The prince's step faltered for just a moment, but he rolled to the side bringing the scimitar in his right hand up as he recovered. James turned, blocking the blade with his shield and flashing the short sword out in a stab.

The stab met air as the prince dodged to the right of the blade, the left hand scimitar arced up from the ground and would have caught James in the stomach and chest if he hadn't jumped back.

"You're not bad." The prince said as he stood up. "I don't know what kind of training your army does, but it's decent. But clearly it isn't great." He pointed at James's left arm. "Your shield's on backwards."

James did not fall for the trick. He just stared at the prince.

"Oh come on." The prince said, not hiding his grin very well. "It is. I swear." James continued to stare. "Oh, alright then. Back to it." And the prince charged again.

James charged again as well. But this time instead of trying to slam the shield into the prince he stopped just short and raised the shield up while crouching a bit more. It was a good thing too. Both of the prince's scimitars clashed into the shield in a crossing pair of slashes, as the prince spun off to the side again.

James resisted the urge to follow up with another stab, and instead stepped back. He held the shield up in front of him, sword raised to his shoulder. He felt like something out of an old spartan movie.

"Smarter than you look." The prince taunted again. "If you'd stabbed again, I'd have taken your hand off."

Once again, James just stared at him. He slowly turned, keeping the shield between him and the prince as the prince paced around him. He felt like a mouse being played with by a cat.

Good. He thought. *That's what I want him to think too.*

The prince stepped back in. He brought his left hand down in an overhead chop. James brought the shield up a bit, but then quickly brought it down and brought the short sword up instead, catching the scimitar mere inches from the top of his head.

The prince was thrown off guard by the feint. But not as much as by the shield then slamming into his ribs, just outside his chest plate. It completely halted the swing that the prince's right hand was beginning and threw the prince sideways onto the ground, gasping for breath for a second.

The crowd gasped as well, but neither combatant noticed.

But it was only a second. Before James could react to the unexpectedly successful strike the prince was back on his feet. He pressed his right hand to his side for a moment and then wiped some of the dirt off his face.

His expression changed. The confident smirk now replaced by a face as blank as James's was. The prince looked him in the eyes. "That's the last time you ever hit me."

James said nothing. Once again, the shield was raised and the sword arm was up again.

This time instead of charging, the prince simply walked towards James. Once in range he began swinging the scimitars. But this time it was different. Where before the attacks had all been telegraphed ahead of time, now the strikes were rapid and chaotic. They seemed to flow unstopping, and anytime James managed to block one, another would follow somewhere else. He was moving the shield and the sword as quickly as he could, back pedaling one step at a time, even as his legs began having to dodge and step to avoid being slashed themselves.

And yet none of them connected with him.

He felt as though the prince could have stabbed or slashed him numerous times, yet each strike seemed to miss by mere millimeters. Even the ones that clanged against the shield or short sword seemed to do so at odd angles.

The prince was still playing with him.

It was as he was thinking this that the short sword rang sharply as a scimitar struck it hard on its flat side. His hand stung and then suddenly he felt something smack sharply into his right wrist. It stung like he'd just been shot by a paintball, or a rubber training round during a field exercise.

The short sword flew out of his hand, and just as it was about to hit the ground a scimitar hooked it at its pommel and sent it flying out of the ring. The crowd parted to dodge the flying blade.

Just like that James had lost the weapon.

But he didn't have time to think about that. He struck out with the shield arm, aiming for the prince's head. He felt the shield get batted away by scimitar strikes, and felt a slash attempt to get through his shirt sleeve. Luckily the tear proof, stab proof, fabric seemed to hold up. But he knew there wouldd be a bruise there later.

The prince ducked as he knocked the shield away. He stepped back a bit as he did, reaching up with his left hand and using his pinky to put some of his hair back in line.

"No sword now. Hope that shield holds up. *HERO."* The prince said, mockingly.

James just held the shield up. But behind it, his right hand reached up for something the prince didn't know about.

When the prince charged this time, right arm back and ready to slash, James dropped the shield to the ground. The prince glanced down at it for a moment as he charged, a look of confusion on his face. When he looked back up he was looking at the front end of a pistol.

The pistol barked loudly, once.

BANG!

The entire crowd, minus Kela, ducked to the ground covering their ears. Kela just smirked, she'd wedged some cotton balls in her ears before the match even started.

The prince was on a knee clutching his right shoulder. The scimitar he'd been holding in his right hand was on the ground. He looked back up at James, who still had the pistol in his right hand. A small wisp of smoke coming from the barrel.

Now James was standing in a different stance. His legs were shoulder width apart, with his left leg a little forward. James's left hand was cupped around the right, steadying the shooting hand.

The prince looked at him in shock. "What in the hel-" He started, but was interrupted.

BANG!

This time the shot hit the prince's left elbow, there was a sickening crunch as it did, and the prince's remaining scimitar flew off to the side as his left arm and hand spasmed from the impact. And the prince spun a bit and fell to the ground. He lurched to his feet and tried to run towards the nearest scimitar, reaching with his right hand. His right shoulder protested in agony, and just as he was about to reach it there was another loud report.

BANG!

This time it hit him on his left side, opposite of where James had hit with the shield earlier. Luckily for the prince, this time it didn't avoid the plate on his chest, so his ribs were saved. But the impact actually hit more forcefully, the metal spreading it out more evenly. As a result the prince was thrown to the side, as if hit by another shield bash.

The prince rose to a knee unsteadily, trying to grip his side with the arm that likely had a broken elbow. He winced.

"What the hell is that thing?!?" The wounded prince yelled.

James walked toward him slowly. As he did he pulled the magazine out of the handle, and ejected the round that was in the chamber. The magazine had green paint all over it, and the round that came out had a blunt, green, rubbery tip.

"This." James said. "Is a Sig Sauer P323. Chambered in .45 A.C.P. Army standard issue." He pressed the green bullet back into the magazine, and put the magazine into a pouch on his chest. Then he pulled a different magazine out. This one didn't have green paint on it. "Those rounds I was hitting you with." He slotted the new magazine in place and pulled back the slide. When he released it, it made a nice satisfying clacking noise. "Were rubber bullets. Well, technically they're a rubber shell filled with some kinda non-Newtonian nonsense in them. But the effect is the same. They hurt like hell."

"What? I thought there were no magic weapons allowed!" The prince yelled. Looking up at his father as he did.

"Oh. No magic." James answered. "My world doesn't have magic. We have science."

"It's true Artair." Gixelle said from her position. "I even had Pokkel stick around and check himself. No magic."

Artair's face went pale. He turned back to James, staggering to his feet.

"You see." James said. "Back on earth I'm not a great shot. Took me about....." He pretended to think for a moment. "fifteen tries, before I managed to get expert. But that was with a rifle. It's like a bigger version of this thing." James held the pistol up and waggled it a bit. "But with pistols?" James made a face, eyes squinted a bit, mouth open in

that 'ooh yeah' expression, then he bit his lip. "With pistols I might as well be the Asian John Wick, dude."

It was true. He'd played VR shooting games all throughout his childhood. And when he'd had a chance to finally fire real weapons he'd found that pistols had come naturally to him. They felt like an extension of his hand. He found shooting them as easy as pointing a finger. And when an army buddy had taken him to an amateur quick-draw event at an old ghost town fair, James had found a new hobby.

Since then, he'd gone to every shooting event he could get enough leave for. He'd never won any of them. Never even broken the top five. But he was still faster and more accurate with a pistol than anyone he knew in his unit.

"You see. You took advantage of me dude. I was new to this world. I was drunk. And I had no idea what I was going up against." He held the pistol up again. "That goes, for you and my new drake buddy Steve. I was scared. I was confused." He gestured for the prince to stand up. "And you bullshitted me by making me feel like it was a matter of honor. And I got my ass kicked and ended up needing a ton of healing as a result. And now," The prince slowly rose up, clutching at his injured shoulder, he began making his way to the scimitar again. "You get to feel the same thing."

BANG!

The Prince screamed this time. He immediately dropped to the ground and clutched his knee with both hands, ignoring the pain in his shoulder or elbow.

Where before the bullets had been rubber and had only bruised, or in the case of the elbow broke, that bullet had been real. It had punched a hole clean through the prince's greaves and gone straight through the prince's knee.

The prince continued screaming.

James flipped the safety back on and holstered the pistol back on the left side of his chest. He stood with his hands on his hips and looked back at the king.

"I think he yields. Even if he doesn't, he aint fightin' no more." Behind him the prince was now sobbing as blood flowed from his beneath his hands..

James walked over, kicked the prince onto his back and planted a foot on his chest. The prince tried curling up so he could reach his knee again, but James swatted his hands away. Then he reached into another pouch and pulled out a piece of cloth that had a metal bar and a metal triangle attached to it.

"Wha- What are you doing now?!" The prince asked pitifully.

James shoved him back down with his foot. "Saving your life. Now shut up." He lifted Artair's leg a bit and looped the cloth around his thigh, it fastened to itself and James began turning the metal bar. "This is called a tourniquet. It'll stop the bleeding." He tightened it some more and the prince whimpered again.

"Stop! That hurts!" Artair complained.

"Then I'm doin' it right. Shut the hell up. I told your dad I wouldn't kill you and I meant it."

The prince struggled some more, so James slapped him. The prince finally stopped struggling, and James finished tightening the tourniquet. He tried wedging his finger underneath it and found that he couldn't. He smiled. "There all done." He said, and slapped the prince's leg. The prince winced and groaned when he did.

Before he got up all the way he whispered. ^("By the way bud. This pistol was on the table, you could have grabbed it if you wanted to. Just sayin'.") Then he smiled and stood up.

James turned to the crowd. He pointed at the pistol on his chest. "IF ANYONE ELSE TRIES TO PULL SOME BULLSHIT. I'LL MAKE THIS BAD BOY GO BANG BANG BANG AGAIN. Y'ALL UNDERSTAND?" He yelled at them. The members of the crowd all nodded, eyes wide.

James turned back to the king. "We done?"

The King sighed heavily, looked to Gixelle. Gixelle nodded.

"The Victor!" The King began. "Is Specialist Choi!" He looked at the crowd. "Is this witnessed?" He said it as a question. But it was clear from the tone that it wasn't one.

"WITNESSED!"

The crowd replied, in unison again. Artair was clutching his knee and crying again.

James looked at him with pity, then back at the King.

"If you don't want him hobbled for the rest of his life, let the healers work on him." James smirked. "But don't go too easy on him. Let it sting a bit." And then he walked over to where Kela was standing and the two of them began chatting.

The King stared at his son for a moment, thinking about what he'd just seen. Then turned to one of his attendants and gave them orders.

Princess Amina watched James very carefully.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (33/?)

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Writer's note: Happy thanksgiving to those who celebrated it. That was why I didn't post yesterday. This one's kinda fillerish again, but does answer some questions. Also, Gixelle is the best Big Sis a guy could ask for. That's all. Enjoy

PS: I don't say it very often. But just imagine Steve constantly annoying Maxel, in the background of this part.

\~

The ride back to the castle was much longer than the ride to the hot springs. They weren't running their mounts hard, like during the mad scramble that the clan had taken on their way there. They didn't have the wyverns dropping snacks for their mounts. Instead, it was just a leisurely stroll, James imagined it would be the equivalent of a horse's trot.

James and Gixelle discussed all manner of things related to being a drake rider. James had lots of questions, and now that he was a fully-fledged member of the clan, he was allowed to be told more.

Gixelle told him that while Steve would die if he did, it didn't work the other way. If Steve died, James would feel the pain of whatever did it. This *COULD* kill him if it was extreme enough, but it was unlikely to do so. But other than that, only James's death had any effect on the bond.

James asked what would happen to Steve if he ever managed to get home. Gixelle admitted that she didn't know. No rider had gone to another plane for the past few millennia, and even then, they'd taken their dragon with them. She had no idea what would happen if a rider travelled to another world without their mount, and she suggested that he not test it.

There were many more questions James had. Was pain the only sensation transferred by the bond? How smart were the various dragon kin? Was there a range limit on the bond's effects? What were his obligations now that he was a clan member? Could a rider bond with multiple creatures? Could the bonds be used on different kinds of monsters? Could they be used on people?

He had a million questions, and Gixelle did what she could to answer all of them.

While they were riding James and Gixelle both noticed the way their drakes interacted with each other. James wasn't one hundred percent certain, but he had a feeling that Steve had a bit of a drake crush on Maxel.

He would consistently bump his head into the side of her neck as they were walking. He'd also lightly hit her on the side with his tail every now and then. Maxel ignored these attempts at getting her attention, and every now and then when Steve hit a little too hard, she would hiss at him. She even snapped at him a few times, though Steve was quick to retreat from her when she did. He still had his muzzle on, and had learned the day before just how much it limited him.

Ahead of them by a mile or so James could see Xhalya, with Artair and Amina on her back. They were keeping roughly the same pace as James and Gixelle were, and headed the same direction.

James had to ask the obvious question.

"Hey..... You're sure that me and the princess didn't do anything right?" He asked.

"Sure? No, not fully any ways." She replied, worrying James. "But tell me. Do the men of your world find themselves, 'corked by their wine'?" She asked.

"Do they what?"

She sighed a little, then she turned to him. "Do men of your world struggle to get hard when they're too drunk?" She said, enunciating slowly like she was talking to an idiot. Which in her defense, James thought, she might be.

"Oh, whiskey dick." He said. He shifted a bit on Steve's back. "Uh.... Yeah." He admitted. "Yeah, we do."

"Well then I'd say you're fairly safe. You two were pretty well out of it. Doubt either of you would've been able to figure out where to put anything."

James wasn't sure whether that was meant to be reassuring or an insult. probably both.

"She's a gorgeous young woman. I can imagine worse ways for a young man to wake up." Gixelle added.

"Yeah well. We're not exactly friends." James said. "First time I ever met her I was wearing a bedsheet, and she punched me in the jaw."

"Yes, I've heard she can be a bit... hot tempered." Gixelle admitted. "Say wasn't captain Kela her packmate before you?"

"Yeah, that's why she punched me." James answered. "Because when I got summoned, I shot Kela and apparently that made me her pack leader. Guess she was angry."

"Makes sense. They've been best friends and rivals since they were kids. I imagine there's a really strong bond there. Most people don't like it when someone gets between them and their best friend." Gixelle said.

"Yeah well, it's not like I ever intended to." James replied.

"Yes. But she's also a *ROYAL."* Gixelle countered. "Royals aren't accustomed to sharing things. I like King Farrick. He's a decent king. But I've seen first-hand that he spoiled his children. Especially after the queen died."

"I'd been wondering why I hadn't seen the queen, or heard anything about her." James said.

"Died after she gave birth to their fifth child, prince Nikal. Sad day in the kingdom. The people loved the queen. She was a lovely lady."

"What happened?"

"Like I said, childbirth. They had the best healers in the kingdom try to save her. Just didn't work. She died three days after the prince was born. King hasn't been the same since." Gixelle replied.

"What was he like before?"

"Meaner. He was close to a tyrant before his wife died. Not quite, but close. Very harsh in his kingly verdicts and decrees." She said.

"Why'd he change? I mean, normally the wife dying cause the tyrant to become a true villain. At least in most of my world's stories anyways." James said. "He seems super nice now. Felt like I was talking to one of my uncles or my grandpa or something."

"Nobody knows. Some people think that maybe the queen asked him to be better as she was dying." Gixelle admitted. "Only person who knows for sure is him. And I'm not going to ask him. Wouldn't suggest you do either."

"Yeah, definitely not doin' that." James replied.

"Wouldn't ask the princess either. Not if you want to keep your chances with her."

"What? I don't want the princess. She's rude as hell." James countered.

"Didn't seem that way last night. The way you two were arguing, it was very adorable. Reminded me of my daughter and her husband."

"You have a daughter?" James deflected. He had to tug on Steve's fur to get him off of Maxel again.

Gixelle grinned at the question. "Two. And a son, though he's off in another country right now. He's one of the king's diplomats. Six grandkids too, seventh on the way." She said proudly.

Despite the grey hair and lines on her face, it was easy to forget that the clan mother was as old as she was. The way she spoke, the energy she

exuded, and of course the shape she was in made it easy to forget that she had to be in her fifties, if not sixties by now. She felt less like an old grandmother, and more like an older sister.

"That must be nice. How old's your oldest?" James asked.

"Mmmm Kasandra." Gixelle said. "She's..... thirty-five? Thirty-six? Something like that. Her oldest is.... I want to say nine now."

"You all on good terms?"

"As good of terms as any mother is with her kids when she's a member of a nomadic organization and they aren't. I suppose." She said somewhat somberly. "At the very least there's no *TRUE* animosity between any of us. Just squabbles and disagreements."

"Sounds like my family a bit. Minus the nomadic bit." James said. "Although I guess I'm now about as nomadic as it gets. Went to a whole new world."

"How are you doing with that anyways? I imagine it must be difficult. Especially not having a choice in the matter." She asked him.

"That's a nice way of putting it." He admitted. "Truth is. I don't think I've fully processed it yet. Don't even know if I can. Everything is happening too fast. I feel like someone who's stuck in a raging set of rapids. Every time I get my head back above water, a new rock or vortex or something slams into me and sends me back under. I'm just doing everything I can to breathe."

The two of them stayed silent for a while. Gixelle let him have a moment to think. It impressed her that a young man could be so self-aware. After a moment, she spoke again.

"Well. You've got a good friend in Kela. You've got a lifelong friend in Steve." She pulled Maxel out of a hissing contest with Steve as she said that. "You've got the Clan backing you up now. And if you ever need someone to talk to like this again, you can always ask me." She said, smiling at him.

James smiled, but only a little. "Thanks."

"Plus, if you play your cards right, maybe you'll have a princess to talk to." She said, chuckling a little and grinning.

"Oh my god. I'm not after the princess. Besides, I'm like, my world's liaison to this world. It'd be a diplomatic nightmare if I started sleeping with members of the royal family." James replied heatedly.

"Oh, you've already slept with her. Now it's time to do the other stuff." Gixelle continued, thrusting her hips back and forward in her saddle as she did.

"THAT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN!" James exclaimed as he kicked Steve into a faster pace.

Gixelle matched him, making kissy noises as she did.

And the two of them kept riding towards the castle, which was now on the horizon.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (32/?)

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Writer's note: Enter Tsundere. *^(maybe....)*

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As the sun rose over the horizon a series of loud squawks and screeches began to sound in the jungle around the hot spring falls of Mount Kragur. The handful of riders who had drawn guard duty blew a few horns lightly, alerting the party goers of the impending dawn. A handful of the partiers were still.... partying, albeit halfheartedly and very drunkenly. The rest were passed out all over the springs. Some had managed to get to their respective tents and cots, several were in hammocks, at least two were floating on bits of wood in the pools themselves. The rest were scattered about like debris after an explosion. All their mounts; the drakes, dragons, wyverns, and the one wyrm that was present were resting peacefully, or were already awake and standing sentinel over their indisposed riders.

James woke with a start. The horn that the guards had sounded had, for just a moment, sounded like the alarm horn that the base at NTC had sounded any time an attack happened. But after a moment the tone of the horn changed and broke the illusion. Then he noticed a light rumbling, he looked toward the sound and saw Steve's head resting on the floor of the tent he was in, and he was snoring.

Then James realized that he was in a tent and didn't completely remember getting there. He had hazy drunken memories of the night before. He hadn't gotten black out drunk, but he had still gotten pretty sloshed. Then he noticed the arm draped across his chest.

James's eyes widened at the realization that, besides Steve, he wasn't alone in the little cot. He was also acutely aware that he was only wearing his boxer briefs and medallion.

He lifted up the quilted blanket covering him and saw a familiar set of raven black hair. He pulled the cover a little further up. Sure enough, that was the princess.

Oooooh noooooo...... James thought. He was frozen. What was he supposed to do? Had they done anything. *Oh god, did we do anything.*

He gently placed the blanket back down over her and did the only thing he could think of. He stayed stone still and pretended to sleep some more. This was made especially difficult by the fact that, now that he was awake, he had to pee.

Luckily, after about five minutes, Gixelle came to the rescue.

"Hey James!" She said as she approached the tent. "Knock knock." She said as she pulled the door flap aside. She stepped over one of Steve's claws and gave him a pet on the neck as she did. The drake grumbled a bit, its eyes twitching. Then Gixelle looked in and saw James's predicament.

He was laying there still covered, with his eyes wide. He mouthed 'What's going on?' at her. She smiled and covered her mouth. She tried not to laugh. Then she whispered.

^("Is that princess Amina?")

^(James whispered back. "Yes, what the hell happened?")

^("You two were talking shit to each other all night last night.") She had to hold back laughter again. ^("It was all very obvious. Also you both were very intoxicated.")

^("Yeah, no shit.") He gestured at the princess. ^("Did we?......") He trailed off.

^("Doubt it. Last I saw Melkar and Darius were practically dragging you two in here. You were both staggering and soaking wet from the pools. Still insulting eachother though.")

Goddamit. James thought. *I didn't think I'd gotten that fucked up.* He looked back at Gixelle.

^("Play dead for a minute. I'll save you.") She said. as she stepped back out of the tent.

James did as she said. A moment later he felt a hard, phantom, slap on his left butt cheek. He would have yelped, but Steve beat him to it.

The drake jumped up, roaring as it did. He also took most of the tent with him. It was wrapped around his head as he struggled to wake up and find his attacker. James and the princess were left on the cot as the beast struggled to free it's face from the cloth prison.

The princess shot bolt upright and launched herself out of the cot and onto her feet. She stumbled and landed on her butt. Then she rolled sideways and rose to her feet quickly.

"WHAT IN THE HELLS IS GOING ON!?!" She screamed, reaching for a sword that wasn't on her hip.

As James rolled out of the cot and scrambled to his feet. He was happy, somewhat anyways, to notice that the princess was wearing a pair of what looked like short pants and a small tunic. He was guessing it was what she wore under her armor, but that was a question for another time.

He and the princess both noticed their clothes sitting on a chest and began moving towards them, but for different reasons. James just wanted to get dressed and get out of the awkward situation ASAP. The princess grabbed her sword. She immediately drew it and pointed it at him.

"What's going on here you bastard?" She asked as he raised his hands. "Why are you in my tent?" She looked around, seeming to notice for the first time that the tent was no longer there. "What.... what happened to the tent?" She looked up at Steve, seeing the drake finally get a claw into the cloth of the tent and shredding it. "Wait. That's not my tent." The situation dawned on her. "What happened last night?" She asked as she raised the sword again.

"According to Gixelle." He said, watching as the silently laughing clan mother ran quietly into the jungle behind the princess. He shook his head. "According to Gixelle you and I spent the night arguing and getting progressively drunker. Two of the riders carried us back here after we went swimming. I'm gonna guess they took our wet-" He touched his pants on the chest and they squelched, water soaking out of them and down the side of the chest. "clothes off and put us together to keep us warm. God, those are still soaked, what the hell?"

The princess looked at the water streaming down the chest, then back at him. Her face was bright red. "Yeah, a likely story. You didn't take advantage of the situation did you?"

"How could I? I was drunk too." He said. "Can you drop the sword? You aint gonna kill me."

"I might." She said venomously.

"Your brother ALMOST got me killed and he's in shackles. How do you think ACTUALLY killing me would go?"

She gritted her teeth, jaw clenching. After a moment she quickly re-sheathed the sword. "Fine. Pass me my breeches." He tossed her the other pair of pants. "This will never occur again."

"Whatever." He said. He turned around while putting his shirt on. Steve was finishing up taking the tent off and he brought his head down to look at James. ^("We're gonna have to have words with Gixelle about that.") He whispered to the drake.

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After an awkward few minutes of getting dressed again, luckily the chest had some clothes in it, The two of them parted ways. James to get Steve fed and find Gixelle. The princess to find her brother and get back to the castle.

James found Gixelle next to a campfire enjoying a plate full of bacon and some of the jungle fruit. Maxel was sitting behind her picking at what looked like the remains of a goat. James walked up sullenly with Steve walking behind him.

"That was a dick move." He said matter of factly as he sat on the log opposite of her.

She took another bite of bacon and then threw a piece at him. He caught it and took a bite. "Funny though."

"Oh, I'm sure it was hilarious." He said sarcastically.

"Relax." She said, chewing the piece she still had in her mouth. "Like I said, I doubt anything happened. A bit of morning awkwardness is no big deal."

James thought for a minute. He shook his head. "Whatever. What's the plan for today?"

"Well." She said, gesturing at the remains of the camp. "As you can see, most of the riders are already gone." Sure enough as James looked around he noticed that most of the tents were gone, only a few of the still drunk riders remained. "Party's over. They're all going back to whatever they were doing before Artair called them. Life resumes."

"Well. What about you?" James asked.

She smiled, bit into the giant peach-berry thing, chewed, and swallowed. "I'll be going back to the capital with you. I have to bare witness to Artair's punishment, whatever you've got planned for him. Plus I'll teach you a bit more about your bond, help you get him," She pointed at Steve, who was hungrily eyeing Maxel's meal. "saddled. Plus there's a bit more business I need to keep an eye on."

"Speaking of me and Steve's bond." James said. "That slap earlier hurt like hell. What did you hit him with?"

"Oh that was just my hand." She flexed her arm. "These muscles aren't just for show you know."

"Felt like someone had shot me with a beanbag round or something." She cocked her head curiously at that. "It's a thing from my world." he said. She shrugged and resumed eating.

He chewed more of the bacon and thought for a moment. Behind Gixelle, Steve was tentatively approaching Maxel's meal. He was clearly intent on stealing some of it.

"So.... yesterday, when you were talking about me and Steve..." He began.

"Yes?"

"You said that if I died Steve's soul would follow." He said.

"Yes, it will." She said chewing some more fruit.

"What does that mean?"

"Exactly what it sounds like." She said. After a moment of James just staring at her curiously, she got the hint. "It's the price." She added.

"Price of what?"

"The bond between you two." She pointed at his leg. "That tattoo. How do you think we get the color for it?"

He looked at the tattoo on the back of his leg. "I don't know. Berries, bone ash, something like that. That's how old school tattoos and dyes were made right?"

"Most of them, yes. Not ours though." She swallowed the fruit she'd been chewing. "Ours are made from scales from our mounts, or in the case of your black variant spikes, from his fur." She pointed at Steve as she said this.

He looked at the tattoo again, then up at Steve. Sure enough the colors were almost a perfect match. "Okay, but how does that equate to our souls?"

"Well, that's just a physical bond. Part of him is now part of you. That's the physical price of the binding spell. But there's always more to a spell than just a physical component."

He was officially out of his depth. He'd yet to get any lessons on magic since he'd gotten to this world. He knew it existed, but he had no idea how it worked. Not yet anyways.

Gixelle continued. "Every spell requires energy. Sometimes it can just be ambient energy. You can pull it from the world around you. Some spells, the bigger, more powerful spells require....more."

"Okay. That sounds pretty standard I guess. At least based on my world's fantasy stories."

She ignored that part and continued. "To bond a drake, or any dragon kin to a person. To make them unable to harm each other, and to be tied to each other? That's a big spell. It requires a lot of energy. If you were a powerful caster, an archmage, a lich, a godly cleric, or a regional druid, you might be able to draw that kind of power from somewhere else. But we don't have a lot of people like that in our clan. So we draw in a different source of power."

"And that's a soul?" He asked.

She pointed at Steve. "It's his soul. A human soul is a powerful thing. Hell some are incredibly powerful." At this, she eyed him cautiously. "But there's no way of knowing that ahead of time. So the drake's soul is a safer bet."

"And as a result, if I?....." He prompted.

She took a swig from a water skin, holding it out to him afterwards, he accepted.

"If you die early, his soul dies with yours. It's designed that way on purpose, in case the drake ever decides to kill you. Keeps it from being a hazard to other riders, or civilians." She watched his reaction.

James thought about this for a minute. He weighed the meaning of it. This was a world full of fantasy-like races, monsters, and magic. And if any of those things killed him, they'd effectively kill Steve too.

"Well, that changes things." He said.

"I imagine it does. Makes you reconsider your," She made a point of looking at where Artair and Amina were riding away on Xhalya. "reckless behaviors doesn't it?"

He turned back from looking at the two riding away. "Yeah." He thought for a minute. "You also mentioned that the exception was dying of old age. What happens then?"

She looked at him, a small smile pulling up the corners of her mouth. James was too lost in thought to notice it. "If that happens, the bond breaks. A soul departing a body violently is a terrible expenditure of magical energy. It can create ghouls, revenant horrors, liches, and any number of other terrible abominations, depending on the nature of the death. But a natural death? Well, that's a much more peaceful thing. Your soul lets go of it's needs, its *bonds,* and simply departs to the heavens.... or hells." She resumed eating.

"That's a lot to take in." James said, brow furrowed as he considered everything he'd just learned.

She just nodded and continued eating. Now was not the time for adding any more to James's plate.

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Roughly an hour later, after helping pack a few more tents back up, and breaking up a scuffle between Steve and Maxel. James and Gixelle hopped back on their drakes and headed back to the castle.

James was too busy thinking about the nature of his new responsibility to notice that, if anything, Steve smelled worse now that he'd bathed in the springs.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (31/?)

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Writers Note: This is another filler-ish one. We'll get to the meaty details of Drake bonds next chapter. Promise.

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James's first ride, his first willing ride anyways, was fantastic.

After leaving Kela, Amina, and Artair behind it took him about five minutes to catch up to the main group of the Clan Riders. When he did the other riders whooped and hollered his and Steve's names. Their mounts nagged at Steve's mane and tail, earning themselves headbutts and staggering claw swings from Steve. But they were playful and halfhearted. Steve was playing with them.

James used the ride to get used to riding Steve. Luckily Steve's fur was soft and smooth, though it still smelled terrible. He hoped that Steve would jump into the pools at the falls and take a bath. Steve still had the enchanted muzzle on, his fire still being a risk, but he didn't seem to mind too much now. What James did realize as the ride went was that he needed footrests. His feet kept losing their places on Steve's sides, causing him to have to readjust every few minutes.

He also started to teach Steve some basic commands. He would yell "Left" or "Right" while pulling Steve's fur on that side to get him to turn. After a while Steve picked up on it, and by the end of the ride James only had to say the command while lightly pulling, and Steve would turn that way. James wasn't sure if this was the right way to train Steve, but it felt right. Steve, it seemed, was as smart as James had thought while teaching him about their bond.

Regardless, for some reason, riding the forty foot tall monster seemed natural to James. It felt like riding a bike. Only most bikes didn't breath fire or try to kill you. It definitely felt more natural for him than riding Erny the horse had.

Besides slowly teaching Steve basic commands, James also spent most of the ride marveling at the other mounts, and learning about the other riders traveling beside him.

The most fascinating of the creatures were the Wyverns. There were only three of them travelling with the group, but each of them was a massive flying creature, one of whom was so large that it probably could have

lifted Steve in a single claw. The wyvern riders would occasionally swoop low, pick up some random creature from the woods or plains that the group was traveling near, rip a ragged piece off to eat, and then toss the remaining pieces to the creatures beneath them. They were like flying refueling stations for the land based mounts. When James asked a nearby rider about it, they confirmed that that was how the wyverns kept a band of clan riders going over long distance.

James felt kind of bad that Steve's muzzle kept him from partaking. But he was amazed at the simple efficiency of the operation. He asked the rider why the dragon riders didn't do the same thing. The rider just shrugged and told him that dragons are too greedy to give up their food. Instead their main job while the clan was riding was to range out and look for threats, their ability to fly or climb made them great at taking up surveillance positions. That also seemed very effective to James.

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It took three hours for the clan to reach the waterfalls. And they were everything James had heard about them.

He'd gotten the suggestion from a dwarf that had been patrolling on the walls of the castle. According to the dwarf the falls were actually a rare set of spring falls that actually originated in the "Deep Dark". As a result most travelers stayed away unless they were well equipped adventurers. Lots of denizens and monsters of the Deep Dark would use the falls as a way out into the world, so it could be dangerous.

On the other side of the equation, the semi volcanic nature of the springs resulted in an incredibly lush area around the falls. Additionally, the fact that the falls were on north east side of the mountain meant that if a person stayed overnight they'd be treated to a beautiful view of the sun rising through the planet's rings, while relaxing next to the fall pools.

The dwarf assured him that it was a beautiful place to go, and that an entire mob of Clan Drakrid riders should be more than capable of handling anything that might pop out of the cave that the falls came from.

The dwarf was right; it was beautiful.

While the woods around the capital had reminded James of the conifer forests all over America, the springs were surrounded by what reminded him more of a jungle. There were even palm trees. At least they looked like palm trees, the fruits didn't look like coconuts though, more like giant blueberries.

It was also warm. Very warm. And as the party neared the falls James could smell the sulfur smell that he'd expected when the dwarf had said that the falls were actually a type of hot spring.

When James finally got to the pool at the bottom of the falls he saw that a makeshift camp had already been set up. The faster of the riders, Gixelle among them, had brought out numerous tents, canopies, and camp

style furniture. It looked like old timey pictures that James had seen of old Safaris. He also had no idea where any of it had come from, none of the rider's mounts had any large cargo on them, just saddlebags.

As he and Steve rode up a cheer rose from all the riders present and Gixelle turned to look at him, Maxel was behind her drinking from the water of the pool.

"Welcome. How was the ride?" She asked as she walked up. Steve lowered his head to smell her and she pet him on the side of his snout. "How'd he do Steve?"

"It was good. Definitely need some um.... what're they called? The things you put your feet in. Stirrups?" James said as he gave the back of Steve's neck some scratches.

"We'll have to measure him up for the saddle when we get back." She said. "Was that the only issue with riding him? Honestly I was surprised when you emerged from the cage riding him in the first place."

"Is that not normal?" James asked as he clambered down Steve's side, Steve laid down as he did, making the drop a bit easier. James wondered if that was intentional, or just because he was tired. Probably both he imagined.

"It's not." Gixelle replied. "Most riders need at least a day or two of earning more of the creatures trust. Some need even longer." She gestured at the path behind them and James saw Xhalya walking into the clearing with Amina and Artair on her back. "Artair needed almost a week and a half."

"Nobody has ever started out riding?" He asked incredulously.

"Of course they have." His heart sank a bit. "It's just rare. Maybe one in every..... hundred or so, riders manage it that fast. Just rare is all." That made James feel at least a little better.

He decided to change the subject. "So when do you think I can take his muzzle off? The other riders were capable of having their drakes fed by the wyverns while we were riding. I felt kinda bad that Steve couldn't get any." He admitted.

She looked at him for a moment, still petting Steve's nose. Behind her Maxel was watching Steve very intently, and James had a feeling that the yellow drake was feeling jealous of the attention Gixelle was giving another drake.

"Hmmm. It's good that you feel such empathy for him so quickly." She thought for a moment. "Technically we can take it off any time you want. All the drakes here are trained enough that if he tried breathing fire too close to anyone they would gang up on him and teach him why that's a bad idea."

"Really?" He asked, amazed that the creatures could understand that concept.

"Oh yes. Every creature here has, at some point, gotten their flames too close to their rider. Remember, they feel our pain just like we feel theirs. They know the hazard of a breath attack near their riders, and will do anything to avoid it happening again." She looked up at Steve. "He'll learn it eventually too."

"Oh, I guess that makes sense." He gave Steve one last good scratch. The drake was watching the other drakes swim in the water and he was stamping his feet, clearly eager to join. James slapped Steve's side and felt a light slap on his too. The drake looked at him curiously. "Go on." He said while pointing at the others. "Go have fun." James gestured again.

Steve paused for a moment, turned back toward the water, and then took off at a sprint. Several riders still setting up camp had to jump out of his way. Then the massive drake dove into the water head first. Maxel dove in after him and began harassing him.

"Wow." Gixelle said, watching Steve go. "He's a smart one. He already knows that phrase?"

"Honestly. I'm not sure. But yeah, I think he's a lot smarter than we realize." James said.

"Interesting." She said to herself. "Anyways, foods already cooking. I'll show you around the falls a bit. Then we can talk more about training Steve, and the bond you two have now. Plus you can meet a few more of the higher up clan members."

"That'd be great." James admitted.

The two of them walked towards the falls, talking the whole way. A fellow rider handed them both pints of ale, another rider offered one of the giant blueberries to James. Oddly, it tasted like a peach.

As he walked and talked James thought of his situation. To him, the members of Clan Drakrid *FELT* like the right people to be a part of. He found himself at ease around them. It was a good feeling. Even if it was made somewhat bizarre by all the fire breathing monsters that formed the connecting bond between all of them.

Later James, Gixelle, Amina, (to a lesser extent) Artair, and all the other riders, partied late into the night.

And this time James made sure to only get a little bit drunk.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (30/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qxocsa/wait_is_this_just_gate_29/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: The big THREE-OH glad to be here, never stuck with a series this well and I'm havin fun. Also for those of you that have been complaining of no NEXT button on the older chapters. you can go ahead and stop now. BTW, glad y'all enjoyed the name reveal, it was real fun to see how amused everyone was.

As always, enjoy.

PS: When you picture Gixelle I want you to take Sloane from Destiny 2, Mirko from MHA (minus the bunny stuff), and Guts from Berserk and smash em up in a DBZ fusion thing.

\~

"........Steve."

James did everything he could to hide the smirk trying to take over his face as he said the completely nonsensical name he had just given the drake beneath him.

He'd spent hours trying to think of a fitting name for the creature. Black Death, Fatalis, Panthero, Fuzzy Gubbins, Bob, Optimus prime, there were so many options just from his world. Then there had been the numerous names suggested to him by Kela and Gixelle. Names based on ancient myths, heros, and monsters from all throughout this world's history.

Eventually he'd gotten a headache from all the choices and simply settled on.... Steve.

There were plenty of famous Steves on his world. Stephen Hawking, Steve Tyler, Stone Cold, Steve McQueen, and of course the fictional Steve Rogers. He wasn't sure but he thought that Steve might have even had some kind of royal meaning way back in the day.

But he'd be lying if he said he'd chosen Steve for any of those reasons. It had just been an easy name to remember, and an amusing one.

As he finished saying Steve's new name, there was a deafening silence. Some of the attending riders murmured and whispered among each other. He could hear some of them sounding the name out on their own. Gixelle looked at him with a mixture of awe and curiosity. The crowd of onlookers behind them all was reacting much the same.

Then a rider he'd yet to interact with, near the back of the group yelled.

"STEEEEEVVVEEEE!!!!!"

And the whole crowd repeated it in unison. They began beating their chests and stomped their feet, chanting the drake's new name with each beat.

Steve himself drew his head back and hissed at the sudden commotion. He'd already been wary of all the people. This drew laughs from some of the older riders, and hands on weapons from the newer ones. James patted him on the side of his neck and the drake looked up at him curiously.

"HAIL RIDER!" Yelled Gixelle, interrupting the chanting of 'Steve'.

"HAIL RIDER!" Repeated the crowd. The chanting having halted almost immediately.

"Where would you ride with us today?" Gixelle asked him.

James had thought of this over the past few days. It was custom for a new rider to pick a destination, and for all riders in attendance to join them if they were able. He'd spent more than a few hours on top of the castle or out on the walls looking around with a borrowed telescope searching for good destinations. He'd also asked more than a few people for their suggestions.

"I've heard about the water falls of Mount Kragur. They're supposed to be quite beautiful, and have deep enough pools to swim in. Man and drake." He said to her with a smile.

She grinned. "A fine choice." She turned back to the riders. "You lot heard him! Mount up!"

A horn sounded suddenly, followed by cries of "**DRAKENRIDAR!"** from the other riders. They all began whooping, and whistling, and yells and ululations. The riders that had been keeping the crowd of onlookers back began shepherding them into a tight circle.

The ground began to rumble, and numerous shrieks, roars, and screeches filled the air.

Gixelle looked up at him. "Keep calm. They're going to agitate Steve to begin with. But if you get excited then he'll follow suit, so stay calm. Once we start riding, just kick him into action and he should get competitive enough to keep up." She winked. "Keep up if you can *RIDER."*

As she said this the first of the drakes came thundering over the hill. It was quickly followed by another from a different direction, and another. Then a dragon came swooping in from the sky, trailing a knotted piece of rope that had to be at least fifty feet long.

Dragons, drakes, and other dragon kin of all kinds converged on the cluster of Clan Drakrid riders. The crowd of onlookers all cowered and huddled together. It was one thing to see one or two of the beasts being ridden, or in the distance. It was another thing entirely to see a mob of them all in one place.

James's eyes were wide in fascination. He'd been amazed when he first met Artair's drake Xhalya. He'd been intimidated, scared, and incredibly impressed when he'd met Steve in his clearing several days earlier. Now he was like a child finally getting to see the trains, or planes, or monster trucks that they'd long obsessed over, in person.

The creatures were of all sizes and colors, some making even Steve seem small or plain to see. The most fascinating though, was the one that belonged to the Clan Leader Gixelle.

It seemed to appear almost out of nowhere. James had to admit this was probably because he was so distracted, both by the spectacle and by his Steve's agitation. But it was also because of how fast the creature seemed to move. One moment it wasn't there, and then the next it was right next to him and Steve, and Gixelle was climbing up its side.

It had a long, slender build. It was also nearly as large as Steve was, though not quite. Its head reminded James of pictures of Jungle Vipers he'd seen seen on TV and in magazines. Its skin was a bright yellow, almost neon, with green spots spaced out all the way down its sides. When Gixelle finally took a seat on its saddle its head reached all the way back and a long tongue darted out and licked her.

"This is Maxel." She said as she defended herself from the serpent's tongue. "She's the fastest drake you'll ever see. A variant too. Now come on, let's go." And the drake began moving.

"One second." he said. "I'm gonna see if Kela wants to come."

Gixelle shrugged. "It is your day." She said.

As Gixelle and the other riders all began riding away, chanting 'Drakenridar!' as they did so, Steve attempted to follow. While he'd at first been agitated and defensive, now he was acting like a dog that saw a bunch of other dogs playing. And sure enough the other mounts were acting much like dogs would when grouped together. They'd nip at each other, chase one another for a bit, James even saw one try to mount another, though curses and smacks from their riders put a halt to it. Some of the flying mounts were playfully zooming around in circles chasing each other. James wanted to throw up just looking at the maneuvers.

James led Steve over to where Kela and Amina were standing. The crowd of onlookers had spread out and some were now heading home, their shepherds having mounted their beasts and ridden off with the rest of the Clan.

"Hey-" James started before struggling to get Steve to stop. "Hey guys. Kela how're the legs today?" He pulled on Steve's fur to try to keep the drake still.

Steve craned down and brought his right eye right up to Kela's face. Kela didn't so much as budge. The drake stared at her for a while. There was a sense of recognition there. Then he turned, sniffed her, sniffed her

legs, brought his head back up, huffed and then began trying to turn away from her.

"Woah hey!" James yelled. "Turn back ya idiot!" He ordered as he attempted to pull the drake back around.

"They're good James. Almost done healing." Kela said as James wrangled his new mount. "Congratulations on your success." She lightly elbowed the princess in the side.

Princess Amina huffed and glared at Kela for a moment. "Yes. Congratulations. Good job not being killed."

"Hey thanks. That sounded almost genuine. Say we're- TURN BACK DAMMIT- We're heading to the falls on the mountain. You want to hop on?" He asked Kela.

"Thanks. But I'm just about at my limit for today. I'm going to go back to my room and have the healers look at my legs." She said. "Besides, I know how rowdy the clan gets when they're celebrating. I don't think I'd be able to keep up right now."

James heard a light clanking approaching and turned to see Artair slowly shuffling up, his feet still shackled together.

"Congratulations, new brother of mine. Welcome to the clan." He said sarcastically. "I'd join you in celebration, but I'm still under lock and key." He gestured to his shackles.

"Actually." Amina interrupted. "I had a thought on that."

"Oh?" Artair asked.

"It's been a while since I've been to the falls. I'd like to see them again." She continued. Kela was looking at her with a mixture of shock and wariness. "Besides, I know that you're supposed to go along if you can *Brother*." She said while glaring at Artair. "Plus the Hero is supposed to have Kela at his side whenever possible, I imagine I can fill in for a single night of guard duty."

"Really?" James and Artair said in unison. They looked at each other uncomfortably before looking back at Amina.

"Yes Really." She countered. "Though I'll not ride on a barely tamed drake, if he even is tamed." She eyed Steve warily. "So Arty, I'll ride with you. Especially since you'll be side saddle for a while."

"Really?" he asked. "You're not going to have these taken off?"

"No." She said as she approached him. "In fact." She pulled out a device of some kind, took a knee and placed it on the shackle chains. "You can have that added." She placed a similar device on her belt. "That way you don't try to run."

He sighed. "A restriction rune? Come on."

"Still gotta face the punishment big brother." She smiled at him. "Now call Xha Xha." She turned back to James. "We'll catch up, go on and let that beast run."

He looked at Kela curiously, she just shrugged. "Okay then. Feel better Kela. I'll see you tommorow."

"Have fun." She replied as she began limping back toward the castle.

James turned Steve toward the departing stampede of riders. He looked back at the castle, and Kela, one more time. Then he leaned down near Steve's head.

"Ready to run boy?" The drake looked up at him curiously. James gave a light kick on each side of the drake while pointing toward the others. "LET'S GO!"

And Steve began running while James just held onto his furred neck.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (29/?)

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EDIT: IDK what happened to my formatting, ignore what you saw until you get to the end, patching things up now

Writer's note: Y'all been makin' hella guesses about what the drake's name is, well here you go.

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Even though there was a chill in the air, James felt incredibly warm.

It was, he reasoned, probably because his heart was beating very fast. Or maybe it was because of all the torches being held up around him. Maybe it was a fever or something, he'd just recovered from some pretty rough injuries, maybe he had an infection.

No. He thought. *I'm just scared. Of what I'm about to do, and about this tattoo.*

He was lying down on a blanket, his head propped up on his arms as Gixelle walked around him. Another member of clan Drakrid, an old grey bearded Halfling went to work preparing the ink and tools to tattoo the

back of his leg. In front of him, about twenty yards away, stood a massive metal box that had holes in its side every few feet.

He could see his drake pacing around inside as the tattoo artist was prepping.

The halfling, Ronnek, had no clothing on his right arm, as a result James could see his Drakrid Tattoo. It was a bright vibrant green next to a large scarred slash that ran from his shoulder down nearly to his wrist. Gixelle wore an outfit that kept bare on the right side of her hips, coming dangerously close to revealing her womanhood. It was a bright yellow bordered in dark green, and sat inside a large bite scar that looked like something out of a shark attack documentary.

Surrounding the three of them were other members of Clan Drakrid, James guessed about twenty, maybe even thirty of them, spaced out about five or ten feet. Each of them held a torch aloft, and each of them had a similarly revealed part of their body. While James couldn't see all of them in the predawn light, he knew that that was where their tattoos were as well, as well as the first injury their mounts had ever given them.

"You ready James?" Gixelle asked him softly.

James nodded. ^("My mom's gonna kill me, but whatever.") He said to himself.

Gixelle nodded at Ronnek, and James felt the needles jab into his calf. He winced a little. But, he had to admit, it wasn't that bad.

"You were called here today!" Gixelle said to the other riders. "To welcome a new member to the Clan." She paused for a moment. "This man was summoned through the god's door, he knows near to nothing about our world. Through some slight.....misunderstandings...." She looked out to a spot that James knew Artair was standing at, his feet still shackled. "He ended up beginning a challenge. To our discredit he was not properly prepared OR equipped. And his drake was not properly scouted ahead of time." She paused again. "Yet despite these handicaps..... despite being battered, slashed, and beaten to within an inch of his life.... despite the people coming to his aid, experienced warriors all of them, ALSO being damn near killed.... despite the fact that the drake he faced was an adult BLACK BRISTLE NECK!!!!" She paused to let that sink in, not everyone here had had a chance to see the drake that was currently caged near them, though they had heard the rumors. "Despite these facts.... HE WAS VICTORIOUS!"

The members gathered around James, as well as the onlookers standing a little ways away all raised a cheer at this. The other riders raised their torches and beat their chests rhythmically while chanting "Drakrid! Drakrid! Drakrid!". Gixelle let them for a moment before holding her hands up to quiet them down.

"It is a rare thing that a variant can be broken. Rarer still to succeed at doing so on the first attempt. His accomplishment is testament to his fighting spirit, as well as the spirits of those who came to his aid that

day. Even despite their other character flaws." She walked over towards the cage a bit and pointed at it. "Now we shall bear witness as he puts in place the unbreakable bond between rider and mount. When he is done.... OUR CLAN WILL GROW EVER STRONGER!!!" Again the chanting from the other riders, and the cheers from the onlookers.

James felt a cool wet cloth rub on his leg for a moment and then felt a slap on the back of his thigh.

"All done guy." Ronnek said.

James rolled over a bit, contorting himself to see the tattoo on the back of his leg. Ronnek held a torch up to cast light on it for him. James saw the clan dragon's head in a dark purple, there were little black spikes coming off of it.

"That was fast." James said, surprised at how easy the tattoo had been.

"Aye, been doin' this for near on forty years now. Think I might be gettin' the hang of it by now." Ronnek said sarcastically.

"Well. Thank you." James said as he stood up, before he raised up completely he held out his hand. Ronnek accepted it, shaking hard.

"Welcome to Clan Drakrid lad."

James stood. The other riders were still chanting. Gixelle held out her hand, and when he shook it she pulled him in for a hug. A hug that made him feel very tiny compared to the massive woman. As she hugged him she whispered in his ear.

"You ready for the hard part?" She asked. James nodded. "Alright, there's weapons next to the door. Pick whichever one you think will do the trick. It can't hurt you, not really. But that's not the point of this. You have to show it what happens if anything hurts you while it's bonded to you. Don't break any bones. But you're gonna have to do some decent damage. Especially with it being a variant." She pulled back and looked him in the eyes. "You sure you're ready?"

James looked at the cage, at the weapons near the small door. Then he looked back at her.

"Don't think I'd ever be ready for this." He said. "But it's like a band-aid, or getting into a cold swimming pool." She looked at him curiously. "Better to just get it over with."

"The healers will be waiting once you're done."

James walked toward the table of weapons. As he did the Clan Drakrid members that he passed each placed a hand on his shoulders, letting go as he continued walking. Some gave words of encouragement, some simply nodded, some just looked him in the eyes for a moment.

James got to the table and took in what was before him. Weapons of all kinds, tools that looked like they were made for torture, some things he couldn't even think of a purpose for. He examined most of them. But in the end, he kept it simple.

He took his shirt off, making sure to take the green medallion off and hanging it from his neck, then tied it around his waist. He picked up a dagger, and a small flail, tucked the flail into his pants, and picked up a torch. He approached the door.

"Like I said." Gixelle said, standing next to him. "It can't hurt you, literally cannot. But it's unrestrained, other than its mouth. Whatever you do; DO NOT BACK DOWN!"

"Got it."

He opened the door and stepped in.

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It was dark inside the cage. The sun hadn't yet risen outside. As a result the only light inside were the small shafts coming through the air holes, and that was only being made by the torches that the other riders outside were holding. And the one that he was holding.

It made him feel like a target, which wasn't entirely inaccurate.

James stood still for a second, letting his eyes adjust. As they did so he became aware of a large dark mass taking up the other side of the cage. The cage itself was massive. Over fifty feet tall and nearly a hundred feet long on each side. It was made of something James thought might be steel, though how it had gotten built so quickly he didn't know. He had to assume it was magic, which would also explain how the drake hadn't escaped yet.

It was watching him. He could see that now. Its back legs were braced against the back wall, and its front legs were tucked under its head, which moved to track his movement. It reminded him of a cat about to pounce. He almost expected it to be wiggling its butt as it calibrated its legs.

Just stay there you massive cat-gator thing. He thought.

He began slowly walking forward, maintaining eye contact the whole time. He needed to provoke it.

"Come on boy." He said. "Come on, give me a swipe." He prodded the torch forward quickly. The drake pulled back quickly.

When the light fell on it he saw that, sure enough, it still had the enchanted muzzle on its snout. This was the one restraint that was required. If the drake could breathe fire than it would be more than capable of escaping. Plus it would be able to kill him before it even realized its mistake.

James walked closer, occasionally jumping at the drake or jabbing at it with the torch. The drake held back, watching him like a hawk, but not falling for the bait. James knelt, still not breaking eye contact, and planted the torch into the soft dirt beneath him. When he rose to his feet again he immediately pounced.

That did the trick.

The massive drake swiped one of its front paws at James. James instinctively raised his arm to try to block the attack, but at the last moment the drake froze. Its face scrunched up and it released a muzzled roar of pain.

"That's right, you sonufabitch. Can't hurt me." James said smiling. He brought the dagger down in a long slash towards the drakes claw while it was still frozen in agony. Just as he was about to hit it he felt his muscles seize up and felt pain course through his body. He was reminded of the time he'd been tazed during training. When the pain passed James collapsed to a knee. "But now you see that I can't hurt you either. Not really."

While he was down on his knee the drake attempted to attack him again, pouncing with both front claws forward, a look of hatred on his face. James didn't even move, he was still processing the pain in his muscles. Just as the drake was about to land it spasmed and slammed onto its side, rolling around and whimpering.

"I told you. You can't hurt me. WE CAN'T HURT EACH OTHER! Ya fuckin' idiot!" James scolded it as he stood back up.

James watched as it thrashed for a moment, whining the whole time. After a few seconds it slowly picked itself up and looked at him warily. Then it spun, and its tail came whipping at James's right side. At the last second it arced up over James's head, missing by mere inches, then slammed into the ground on the other side of him. The drake thrashed again, letting out more agitated whines through the muzzle.

When the drake recovered it began clawing at the muzzle on its face. James could feel the heat growing, telling him that it wanted to burn him. But the muzzle didn't budge an inch, and its claws didn't even leave scratches on the enchanted leather.

But they did scratch the drake's face. James winced and let out a grunt as he reached up and touched his face. He could feel the scratches, it felt like a cat had clawed his face. But his hand came away clean.

When the drake heard him grunt it stopped for a moment. It looked at him curiously. Then it began clawing at the muzzle again, but the heat died down. It scratched its face again and James once more felt the phantom pain in his face as well. When he groaned the drake stopped and stared at him.

It brought its face within inches of his face. James pulled his hand down from his face. The drake stared him in the eyes. Then it slowly raised a single clawed finger to its face.

It dug the claw into its cheek this time, slowly, and nowhere near any of the muzzle straps, and it bit in deep.

Fuck, this thing is smart. James thought as he grimaced and reached up to touch the part of his cheek that was burning. *Good.*

The drake seemed almost to smile as it saw James's reaction. But then James held the dagger up next to the opposite cheek. The drake backed up like distance would change the result.

James sliced the blade across his cheek.

It hurt like hell, and he instantly felt blood pour down the side of his face. But the drake felt it too. It began whining as it placed its clawed hand on the corresponding cheek.

"That's right bitch!" James exclaimed. "Your pain hits me..... And mine hits you. We belong to each other now. Good or bad."

The drake studied him. Then it looked down at the claw. James thought that it was also probably looking for blood like he had. Then it began approaching it again.

James quickly sliced his chest on the right side, his jaw clenching as he felt the skin part and felt the pain radiate through him. The drake flopped onto its side, whining and craning its neck to lick its chest. Then as the realization dawned on it, it slowly looked back up at James as it righted itself.

James dropped the dagger and pulled the flail out of his waistband. When the drake got close he lashed it at the drake's eye, causing it to flinch back. But once again James froze in rictus as his muscles spasmed and burned. As he recovered, and before the drake could react he brought the flail whistling over his shoulder and lashed his back, hard. He felt wetness spread there, and was happy to see the drake roll onto its back in pain. James dropped to a knee again, breathing heavily from the pain.

Goddam, this sucks. He thought. *Having you as a mount better be fuckin' worth it.*

He stood up as the drake righted itself again. The two of them stared at each other.

James dropped the flail and stood in front of the drake unarmed. He held his arms out wide in a sort of 'What are you going to do now?' gesture. The drake snarled low and began to approach again. James didn't move.

It stopped only inches from his face, its head at an angle so that its right eye was staring directly into James's. They looked at each other like that for a while, neither of them backing down.

James moved his right hand towards the drake, it pulled its head back a bit to watch. James placed his hand on the side of the drakes furred neck, digging his nails in deep just like he had back when he first approached the thing days before.

Then he began giving it deep neck scratches again. Once more its legs began kicking into the dirt and its eyes closed and lips pulled back as it enjoyed the sensation. James redoubled his efforts, bringing his other hand up to join in on the scratching. Eventually the drake began to roll over and James transitioned to scratching the underside of its neck as well.

Once again. No animal can resist THE SCRITCHES! James thought triumphantly.

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As the first light of day began to rise over the horizon, casting a warm orange glow over the area. The members of Clan Drakrid, as well as the onlookers further behind them, waited. They had been listening to the commotion inside, hearing James's yelling and scolding, hearing the beast thrash about. They waited patiently.

In front of the crowd of onlookers, which was being kept back by several of the clan members for safety, Kela sat on the ground. She was still recovering from her injuries, though she was almost done healing, and sat because her legs still wobbled a bit if she stood too long. She needed to see that James survived this.

Princess Amina stood next to her. She was here to support her friend while she recovered, but also as a matter of curiosity. This out-worlder still angered her. But she had to admit, she was impressed by what he had accomplished here. However today went he had managed something extraordinary. But a small part of her still hoped the drake would manage to hurt him a good bit.

Gixelle stood near the door that James had entered. Listening, and waiting, hoping that the impressive little man would emerge successful. She had a feeling that he would. But still, it was a variant in there with him. If ever the process could go wrong, it was with a variant.

After nearly thirty minutes of silence, there came a ringing sound from inside the cage. Three loud rings, followed by two soft ones. The signal to open the larger gate.

He's done? Gixelle thought. *How? This normally takes hours.*

She looked to the two riders stationed near the gate. They were already watching her for their signal. She nodded, and each of them grabbed the bars that were holding the gate shut, and pulled them out. Two other riders grabbed the doors and began pulling them open, more joined in, helping open them faster.

A second later a large, dark purple scaled drake head, with a black mane around its base emerged. It peered around at them. It seemed angry, or at least Gixelle thought so, but also curious. The riders all had their hands on their weapons, not they would do much to the beast. And then the drake walked further out.

Gixelle, the riders, Kela, Amina, and all the onlookers watched for James. They'd expected him to be the first one out the door, leading the drake along carefully, or at the very least to be walking at its side guiding it with a hand. But he wasn't in either of those positions. It was only as the drake emerged fully that they saw him.

He was riding it. His legs hung next to each of its shoulder blades, and his left hand was gripping a wad of the fur running down its back. The drake raised its head, and James raised his right fist in the air.

He's already riding it. Ran through the minds of more than a few of the people watching, not the least of which were Gixelle and Kela. Artair looked on in disbelief, eyes wide.

Then James spoke. It was time for him to finish the ceremony, and name his new companion.

"Today I join Clan Drakrid as a drake rider!" He exclaimed. The fellow clan members chanted the name one more time. "From here on out, I shall ride this drake in my journeys! I cannot, and will not, ever knowingly harm him. Nor shall he harm me. Should I fall, he shall follow. We will ride as I rush to safety! As I ride to war! As I hurry to the aid of my clan brothers! And as I ride simply for the sake of enjoying my drake's company! BECAUSE THAT IS NOW MY RIGHT AND OUR PRIVILEDGE!!!" He'd rehearsed the words of the speech numerous times over the previous days. "And I shall do so proudly! From the back of my black bristle neck drake, who's name shall be....."

He let it hang in the air for a moment as everyone waited.

"........Steve."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (28/?)

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Writer's note: Bit of a recovery/filler chapter.

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It took James three more days to recover fully. The healing mages would visit him in the morning after he'd woken up, and again in the evening before he settled down for the night. They'd analyze his injuries, their eyes glowing blue like Pokkel's had on the trip back. Sometimes they would also use healing magic to speed things up, but usually they just gave him a potion and changed his bandages.

They visited Kela a lot more often, typically five to six times a day. Each day she got a little bit stronger, the bandages a bit smaller, and they gave her less medicine for the pain. But it was still taking a while.

James was actually surprised at how she was healing. He'd peaked a bit when they were changing the bandages. The skin underneath actually looked fine. It was odd to see it without the fur he'd grown accustomed to. But the burns were healing quickly and didn't look to be leaving any scars. Although he had to admit that he probably wouldn't know what scars would look like in the first place. But he asked one of the healers, and they confirmed that once Kela had healed it would be all but impossible to tell she'd ever been burned in the first place. That reassured him and made him feel better about her injury.

After three days his bandages were removed once and for all. His calf had a long slash mark scar from the side of his knee curling all the way down and around to his ankle. His shoulder had a smaller, but wider scar. But other than that James looked and felt fine.

The King and the Clan Mother of Clan Drakrid both stopped by to talk to him, and to check up on Kela. The King discussed with him the plan to flog Artair for what he'd done, and both of them explained how Artair's way of handling the challenge had been flawed and dangerous from the start.

James was incredibly angry that he'd fallen victim to such childish endangerment, but he couldn't deny that he was somewhat at fault himself. He never should have gotten as drunk as he had, and he should have just backed out once he sobered up.

But that was the past. All that was left now was to deal with it moving forward.

He had some kind of bonding ceremony to take part in that would put the wild drake completely under his control. Then he had to give it a name. And then he had to take part in the induction into Clan Drakrid, which involved something that was liable to make his mother want to kill him if she found out about it.

He was going to have to get a tattoo.

He learned all this from the Clan Mother, Gixelle. She'd insisted on meeting him personally to apologize for Artair's actions, and because

she'd been impressed by the fact that he'd succeeded the challenge despite Artairs foolishness.

Gixelle reminded James of numerous anime and comic book characters he'd seen. She was human, but she was well over six feet tall, and she was so heavily muscled that she would have put body builders on earth to shame. When she met him she'd been wearing an outfit that would have looked fitting in any crossfit gym back home, and she'd had a massive sword on her back. He had a feeling that he wouldn't have even been able to lift it. She had grey hair, dark sun tanned skin, and lines on her face, yet James felt like she would destroy him and anyone elsein his unit at a PT test and barely break a sweat.

In short, he easily understood how a clan full of drake riders, and dragon riders, had chosen her to be their leader. Lord knew he didn't ever want to stand in her way.

The two of them sat and talked in the mess hall for nearly two hours. She explained in detail how amazing it was that James had even survived the fight with the drake, much less successfully broken it, even with help. She also explained the importance of the bonding ceremony, how it would grant him full control over the beast, as well as link them. It would effectively force obedience by making it so the drake would never be able to hurt him, and that if he ever died of anything other than old age, the drake's soul would follow his into death.

She also explained the membership of Clan Drakrid. Once tattooed he would be a member, for life. He would be given something called a screamer that would allow him to summon nearby Clan brothers whenever he was in danger, or whenever he was helping initiate a new member after a successful challenge was completed. But he would also be expected to answer if any other Clan members used their screamers to summon help. Additionally, once every five years he was expected to attend a meeting of the Clan, the next of which was expected to happen in a year and half. He'd know it was coming when he heard a screamer that he apparently wouldn't be able to miss.

She assured him that he would get more information once he had been inducted. The two of them also discussed Earth a bit. She wanted to know if their were any similar organizations on his world. He'd been hesitant to tell her about the Hell's Angels, and a few other even less savory groups *\[writer's note:we aint goin' there\]*. She'd been somewhat amused at the comparison to a band of outlaws. But also impressed when he mentioned how their obsession with taming wild monsters reminded him somewhat of the old pilots that had been obsessed with breaking the sound barrier and getting into space. When he'd explained them she had seemed childishly fascinated by the concept of high speed jets and rockets. She admitted that if she'd lived in his world she probably would've tried to be one of them.

As they talked and ate, James came to find that he liked the Clan Mother. As he thought about it, he also found that he liked the idea of being in a brotherhood of people that would run to each other's aid at a moment's notice. A group that had a seemingly loose hierarchy, yet still had rules

to follow, and leaders to enforce them when needed. It wasn't a military, not really, but he couldn't help but see the similarity to the bond he'd had with his fellow soldiers back home. And he thought it would be a nice thing to feel that again. Even if he'd stumbled into it accidentally.

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James's conversation with the King was significantly less pleasant. At first.

The King had stopped by the room to check on him and Kela the day after he'd woken up. Amina accompanied him, without her armor on. He was happy to see James up and moving again. But both he and the princess were also clearly agitated and worried about Kela's state, despite Kela's insistence that she would be fine.

The King had spent more than a little time pacing back and forth ranting about Artair's actions, and apologizing to James for ever letting the two of them cross paths. James tried to tell the king that it was at least partially his fault too, for being a drunk idiot. But the king would have none of that.

Eventually the conversation turned to Artair's punishment for his actions.

James paled at the idea of Artair being flogged. He disliked the guy, and definitely wanted him to be punished for what he'd done. But this seemed distasteful to him. He had to remind himself that in a medieval world flogging was probably a pretty light punishment all things considered.

They could draw and quarter him, or do whatever that shit in Braveheart was. James thought. *Maybe flogging isn't so bad.* Still, it didn't sit well with him.

He was surprised when the King told him that Artair's punishment would be set aside until James had decided on a punishment that HE would like carried out.

James thought for a moment. He didn't want Artair Killed. He didn't even want to think of the kind of repercussions that might have. He also didn't want to do anything overly cruel. Making him run laps around the castle seemed a little too light, and a little JV footballish or something.

He also didn't want to target Xhalya at all. The princes drake may have taken part in the whole debacle, but ultimately she had just been doing what her master had told her too. He couldn't punish an animal for its master's shortfalls.

Then an interesting idea popped into his head.

"Say. King Farrick?" James said, snapping the King out of a conversation with Kela.

"Yes?"

"Does your kingdom have any sort of, 'Ritual Combat' or anything for this kind of thing?" James asked.

"Well yes, of course. Almost all kingdoms of this world do." The King responded. "Why? Do you want to fight Artair? I mean, I understand if you do. But you should know he's trained his whole life with some of the best swordsman out there. He won't be easy to beat."

"That's fine. What are the rules on weapons in trial by combat?" James asked, curious.

"Well. No magic, or magic weapons." The King replied.

"No magic. What about non magic weapons?"

"Well as long as there's no magic involved you can use whatever you want really." The King said, a look of curiosity on his face. "Why?"

"Well I think I know how I would like to punish the prince." James said, a grin on his face. "But if it's okay with you. I'll need the rest of the gear that I brought with me. Including the stuff from my vehicle."

"That should be fine.... for ritual combat.... I suppose." The King said hesitantly.

"Excellent." James said, smiling. "The prince and I can have our fight tomorrow at noon. Now if he loses. What can I subject him to as a result."

"Well." The King said, still curious, but also a little concerned at James's enthusiasm now. "Like I've said; I'd prefer if he wasn't killed. But if you defeat him, he'll be subject to your desires, so long as they aren't anything illegal or inhumane."

"Perfect." James said. "I've got a plan."

"I have a feeling I'm going to want the mages on hand to record this." The King said.

"And the healers. He's gonna need them." James said devilishly.

Amina, who'd been speaking with Kela while holding her hand in both of hers looked up. She'd been half listening to the conversation the two had been having. A habit of being her father's general and lead protector. At hearing James's request she couldn't help but be concerned. But she was also happy to think of what the weapons of this other world might do to her brother. He'd been needing a beating for years now. It would entertain Amina greatly if it came from the diminutive out-worlder.

Wait, is this just GATE? (27/?)

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James didn't know how long he had been out. But when he woke up the sun had gone down. He knew this because he was looking up at the sky. He'd have been able to see the stars except for the fact that there were torches burning nearby that prevented it. He also seemed to be bobbing up and down lightly.

As he slowly became more aware he realized that he was lying on some kind of oversized hammock. There was something soft and furry pressed up against his left side. He almost jumped up for a moment, thinking it might be the wild drake, until he realized that it was Kela. She was sleeping, but she wasn't snoring like she normally did.

He looked down with his one opened eye and realized that both of them were heavily bandaged. Kela had gauze wrapped around her from the waist down. The bandages were soaked through with plasma and some darker fluid that he thought might be blood.

I hope she's alright. He thought. *She's a werewolf, she must be able to heal from this. It wasn't silver, so it shouldn't kill her. Right?*

Then he looked down at himself. He had a tight fitting wrap around his chest, and when he touched it he felt pain shoot through his sides. *I must've broken some ribs.* He thought. He also had a lot of bandaging on his right leg that felt wet, and could feel another wad of bandaging on the back of his shoulder. On his chest, hanging from a leather strap, was the green medallion. It was as he noticed this that he heard someone unfamiliar speak.

"Oy! The little one's awake." The voice came from somewhere below him. "Oy Art! One o' your people's awake!"

Suddenly there was an impact on the hammock that James and Kela were on. A black haired dwarf came bouncing up to James's side with a torch in his hand. James tried to crawl back away from the dwarf, but stopped when his shoulder flared in pain. He winced and fell onto the opposite side, only for his ribs to remind him of their injury too.

"Oy, stop it now lad." The dwarf said calmly. "I aint gonna hurtcha. Lemme see your injuries now." The dwarf rolled James over onto his back gently. Its eyes began to glow with a soft blue light, and its right hand began emitting an amber colored light.

"Where am I?" James asked. "What's going on?" But he began to relax as he felt his pain slowly fade a little. It was still there but it just seemed, less somehow.

"Relax lad. I'm Pokkel. These other fine folk," He gestured out at the other torch carriers, but James couldn't see them in the dark. "are members of clan Drakrid. Artair done summoned us the second you broke yon beasty. He's a biggun too, you should be proud."

"I don't know." James said hazily. "I think I'd have rather stayed home today."

"Can't say I blame ye." Pokkel said. "Arty half arsed this whole thing. He should've never thrown ye at the dang thing without scouting it out better, and preparing you better. Though it was just bad luck that it was a variant." Pokkel stepped away from James and began looking at Kela with the glowing eyes. "Local clan leader is already on her way. When she finds out about this she's gonna be right cross with him."

"Bit of a dick move on his part." James said, already slipping back into unconciousness. He felt someone else land on the hammock. But he was already pretty much out before they got to him.

"Ay lad, that it was. Now let's see how your furry friend is recoverin'. The poor lass."

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When James awoke again he wasn't on the hammock any more. Kela wasn't by his side either. His surroundings seemed oddly familiar.

Either this was the same room he'd first woken up in in this world. Or, at the very least, it was one that was almost identical. Same clean white bed with wooden fittings. Same blank walls and small dresser. He looked towards the wall half expecting Kela to be holding his phone again.

But she wasn't there.

James got up. The pain he'd been expecting was there, but it was incredibly dull. He looked down and saw that he no longer had the wrap around his chest. The packing on his leg was still there, but smaller and not soaked through anymore. He reached back and found no bandage on his shoulder. Then he realized that he was seeing with both eyes. He touched his face and found no swelling.

James stood up. His right leg ached, but not enough to be a problem. He limped over to the dresser and grabbed the clothes that were on it. It wasn't his uniform, but he did recognize them as some of the clothes that he and Kela had gone out and bought. A blue shirt that reminded him of some of his dress shirts back home, a pair of brown trousers, and a pair of brown traveling boots that came up to his calfs. He rolled those down like Kela had shown him since they rubbed against the bandage. He also grabbed the green medallion and fastened it to the chest of the shirt.

Then he stepped out the door and into the hallway, limping slightly. He walked a bit until he came across one of the castle workers carrying a tray of what he assumed was food.

"Excuse me." He said, startling the elf woman a bit. "Do you know where Kela is? Um the Captain? Is she okay?"

"Glad to see you awake sir. I hope you're feeling better." She said. James nodded a bit while smiling. "The captain is in her quarters. She woke up yesterday. Would you like me to fetch her?"

"No." James said. "No I know where that is. I'll go meet her. Say, is any of this water? I'm thirsty."

She opened the tray and handed him a small glass. He accepted it and downed it in a single gulp.

"Thanks." He said.

"Certainly sir. Glad to see you up again." He nodded again. Then he started making his way back to Kela's quarters.

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In the throne room King Farrick stood, leaning on his throne. Standing on the other side of the throne, resting her hands on a massive sword that had its point in the ground was a large, grey haired, woman wearing leather armor. Princess Amina and the royal guard stood around the room, pole-arms and shields at the ready. But they weren't watching the woman, they were watching prince Artair.

Artair kneeled before both of them. His hands and ankles were shackled and the shackles were bolted to the ground. He wasn't wearing his armor, or his weapons, just pants and a shirt.

"Artair, what in the hells did you think you were doing?" The king asked. "You knowingly endangered the Summoned Hero. You threw him at a drake with almost zero preparation. And on top of that it ended up being a damned variant. You almost got him killed, you almost got Kela killed, and on top of that you almost got yourself and Xhalya killed. What were you thinking?"

"Father. The lad insulted me numerous times. Clan Mother he insulted the ways of Clan Drakrid numerous times. And he raised challenge that he could ride any monster in the land. I was obligated to test his claims." The prince said with a smirk.

"HE'S A DAMN OUTWORLDER!" The king exlaimed. He paced back and forth in front of the prince, gesturing with his hands. "HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW THE NAMES OF THE DAYS ON THE CALENDARS! WHY IN THE HELL WOULD YOU THINK HE KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT GODS DAMNED DRAKES!"

"And whose fault is that father?"

The king rounded on him. "Don't you dare question me boy! That poor lad has been here all of a week. He's still adjusting to our world. AND YOU THREW HIM AT A BLACK BRISTLE NECK!"

"And he lived." The prince said smugly. "And now the summoned hero has a black bristle neck for a mount. We can get him bonded once he's healed. Get him tattooed. And he'll also end up having the support of the Clan. How is this a bad thing?" The woman with the sword rolled her eyes.

"I'm not going to argue with you about what he's gained you damned fool." The king glared at him. "This is about how you almost got him killed! And what's this about you taking the God's door medallion eh?"

"Honestly." The prince said with a guilty grin. "I just liked the way it looked. And didn't want it to get eaten if he failed."

King Farrick stood, mouth agape, a look of disbelief on his face. "I... Gods dammit I fucking can't with you." He turned and signaled the one servant that was in the room. "I need wine please." The servant ran off to fetch some. The king leaned against his throne, rubbing his face with his hand. "Gixella, what does Clan law say about this?"

The woman stood up straighter. She picked the sword up one handed, slapped her left hand against the side of the blade, and then spun it up and sheathed it on her back. She ran her fingers through her grey hair, sighed, and then spoke.

"Technically if the boy challenged him, and insulted the clan, then I'm inclined to side with Artair." She said. The king looked at her with just a hint of scorn. "However." She continued. "Given the circumstances I don't think the normal laws apply. At the end of the day the Royal protection mandate that the hero's emblem implies is higher than the clan law. What with it being ordained by the gods themselves."

"See?" Farrick asked Artair.

"Furthermore. There is the matter of how half cocked Artair carried it out." She pulled a flask from her belt and took a swig, then she handed it to the king, who sniffed it and also drank. "If a challenge is raised, the challenger is to be given proper time to prepare and equip themselves as needed." She stood in front of Artair. "Clearly. That didn't happen. I mean seriously Art. Vellal Sap? What are you? A child?"

"Just thought it'd be funny is all. Besides, it did end up helping him stick to the thing."

"Sure." She admitted. "Took Pokkel and Torag about an hour to get it, and all the fur, off of him. But the smell of the stuff probably made it easy as hell for that drake to smell him, especially with it being a bristle neck."

"Admittedly a bit of an oversight." The prince admitted.

"One." She said. "Of many."

The king stood next to her, speaking softly as he handed the flask back to her. "What does clan law say should be done?"

She took the flask, surprised to find it half empty now, took one more swig and then replaced it on her belt. "Sadly, not a lot. Technically the challenge IS a success. We will have to welcome the hero into our ranks. He'll be able to call on us should he ever be in grave danger again." She paused, frowning. "If it were our way, I'd kick this idiot out of our clan." she gestured to Artair as she said idiot. "But it's not. Sadly I think this falls entirely on your ruling Sire. " She thought for a moment. "Plus I imagine you'll want us to teach him to train the thing?"

The king hadn't thought of that. He grimaced and sighed. "Yes, I suppose he'll have to won't he." He rubbed his chin. "Technically I could have Artair killed for this. But he didn't get James killed, and I'm guessing your clan wouldn't appreciate it? Plus, I'd be lying if I said I could actually pass that sentence on my own son. Much as I want to some times."

She shrugged. "Perhaps." She turned and looked out the nearest window for a moment. "Perhaps we should ask the hero what he wants done. Besides, I'd kind of like to meet the man who can break a black bristle neck with no training and without dying. He was unconscious when I met up with the recovery party."

"You know, that's not a bad idea actually." The king said, thinking about the notion.

The servant returned with the wine and some glasses. She poured two and handed them to the King and Gixella. She was about to return to her former position when the king addressed her.

"Tal'Na?"

"Yes your highness?" She responded.

"Go and find out the status of the hero for me. Find out if he's awake, and if he isn't ask the healers how they expect him to recover. I'll need to speak with him."

"Right away your highness."

The king turned back to his son. "You'd better hope the hero is as merciful as I think he'll be lad." His jaw clenched for a moment. "Either way, you've endangered the hero, and caused the captain of my guard to suffer a grievous injury. The healers said that her being a werewolf was the only reason she survived. For that you'll be flogged in the courtyard. But only after the hero has made his decision on you."

"Again?" The prince asked sarcastically.

"Aye. Again. And this time you can heal from it the old fashioned way. No magic, no potions."

At that the prince finally showed some fear. His face went pale. The king looked back at Gixella.

"Sound fair? No issues with you and yours?" He asked.

She shrugged casually. "It's less than I would've done."

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After about an hour of walking, he'd gotten a little lost, and he'd walked slowly because of his leg, James managed to get back to Kela's quarters. As he did the doors opened, and a person wearing white robes and carrying a brown suitcase exited. The person nodded at him and he nodded back, then they walked away.

He knocked lightly as he entered. He heard a very soft reply. He pushed the door open gently and found Kela lying in her bed. She was still bandaged from the waist down. She turned to him slowly.

"Hey James." She said groggily. He had a feeling that she was drugged up pretty hard. "You're okay."

"Yeah." He replied. "I'm a little worse for wear. But I think I'll be alright." He gestured at the bandages while he gently sat down at the foot of the bed. "How're you doing?"

"Right now? Just fine." She said. Then she giggled. *Yep, she's high.* James thought. "Just got burned real bad. Drake fire. It's one of the few things that can hurt a werewolf besides silver you know?"

"Really?" He asked. He felt bad. She never should have had to come save him. "I didn't know."

"Oh yeah." She said. "Hurts real bad too. But it's okay. It'll heal. Just takes a while. I know cause I've been burned by it before." Her eyes closed slowly. "Long time ago...." And then that tell tale chainsaw started up softly.

James sat for a moment, not wanting to wake her. But he also felt a lot of guilt.

I should've just told Artair to go fuck himself. He thought as he got up slowly and went to his room.

Wait, is this just GATE? (26/?)

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Writer's note: Y'all need to understand that Kela's fast as fuck boi!

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The second that Artair, riding Xhalya, and Kela began moving the wild bristle neck drake also charged in their direction. It let out another great roar. Xhalya replied with a roar of her own, though it was significantly less intimidating.

Kela ran wide left, moving as fast as she could while deftly vaulting over the various carcasses and detritus strewn around the clearing. Eventually she made it to the broken tree and leaped, planting her feet on the side of its tip and then immediately launching herself into the air back towards the wild drake.

Xhalya met the drake in combat right as Kela was launching herself. The two drakes impacted each other like fighting lions. The two monsters clawed and bit at and slammed into eachother repeatedly. The wild drake was significantly larger than Xhalya, significantly stronger. But Xhalya's lower position gave her better leverage, and while she wasn't as strong she was much faster, and had experience in combat.

Plus she had Artair on her back.

As Xhalya engaged the monstrous opponent, Artair swung out with his saber. It was a fantastic weapon, made by one of the best blacksmiths in the capital. It had killed more than a few of his enemies, and even saved him from numerous monsters. But compared to a drake's hide, and a bristle neck's at that, it might as well have been a dinner knife. The only thing that allowed it to make any impact on the beast was the fact that its wielder was incredibly well versed in drake anatomy and weaknesses. Artair jabbed and slashed the weapon into every weak point he could think of. Still the damage he was inflicting was minimal, especially since he was constantly dodging the beast's claws and gnashing mouth.

Plus he had to avoid hitting James, whose hands and legs were wrapped around the drakes neck, right where most of Artair's attacks were landing.

Kela impacted the side of the drake's body, knocking it off balance temporarily, instead of letting herself fall she grabbed onto the fur on the beast's back. She climbed up trying to reach Jame's position. But the melee the two drakes were engaging in kept her from making any easy progress.

"James!" She said as she lost her footing. "James?! Are you alright?" She was dismayed at the bruising all over his face and arms, and the blood running down his leg.

James looked back at her. "Kela. " He said weakly. "Can you understand me now?"

"Yes. It's the medallion James." She grunted as the drake was impacted by Xhalya. "No time. We're going to get it to chase us. HANG. ON" She ripped the medallion off her chest and tucked it into the back of his pants. It was a crude solution. But there was no time for anything better. "HANG. ON" She reiterated. She climbed down the side a bit, reached down into

the wild drake's arm joint with her left hand, and began slashing the drake's armpit.

The beast roared again in agony, pulling away from Xhalya as the werewolf savaged its shoulder. She continued for a moment and then, seeing the drake turn its head and glare at her, she jumped off.

"ARTAIR, I THINK I GOT IT MAD!"

"ME TOO!" He replied. "HOP ON! LET'S GO!"

Xhalya was already running towards the opening she'd already opened on her way into the clearing. Artair had sheathed his saber and was waving at Kela to follow. She and the wild drake stared at each- other for a moment. Then it began to pull its head back, just like it had before it had burned her.

So she ran again. But this time, instead of running to the side, she ran straight for it.

The drake clearly didn't expect it. It tried to track her for a moment and then began closing its mouth, the heat James had felt building died back down, again. He was relieved. He didn't have enough energy left to pull the monsters ears again. Kela ran just under the monster's neck, dodging a little as it tried, and failed, to snap at her. She ran towards Xhalya and Artair.

The drake followed, roaring angrily.

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Five hours.

That was how long it took for the drake to finally run out of energy. Five hours of Xhalya running for her life. Five hours with Artair on her back firing arrows at the drake and directing Xhalya away from the city slowly, and Kela occasionally jumping off to distract the wild drake from a different direction.

Even with their coordinated efforts it was a close thing. More than a few times they managed to dodge its bites and claws by inches. At one point they'd been forced to circle back a bit to avoid a small farming village, and the drake had almost got them with another fire breath attack.

Five hours of James holding on in a state of semi-conscious exhaustion as the beast clambered over obstacles, crashed through dense forest woods, and occasionally jumped off small hills or cliffs. Five hours of his muscles screaming at him. His hands and forearms cramping and burning, his legs spasmed and charlie horsed over and over, his back tightened in knots.

He thought, for a brief moment, that if it hadn't been for his marathon running endurance he might not have been capable of holding on that long. He had no idea how Kela and Artair were keeping up like this. He had to

imagine they were incredibly exhausted. He also had the thought that if Odie or Batty had been in this situation, they'd've fallen off hours ago. He'd always had a way better PT score than either of them. But that was neither here nor there.

Right now he had no way of knowing what would happen if he fell off. So he simply didn't let himself.

When the drake finally stopped it did so suddenly. One second it had been running, just as fast and angry as when it had started. The next it simply collapsed on the ground, legs splayed, head flat on the ground. It was breathing heavily, and from where James was sitting he could feel its heart beating like a jack hammer. He had a feeling that his was too.

When it was clear that the monster wasn't going to move again James allowed himself to relax. He let go with his hands and relaxed his arms and legs. He stayed on the beast's back, but relaxed as much as he could. If it weren't for the smell and the fear that was coursing through him he might've fallen asleep in the nice soft fur.

Once Kela and Artair realized what had happened they stopped Xhalya and turned back.

"Is that it?" Kela asked.

"Should be." The prince said. "Bigger drakes tire faster than the smaller ones." He looked back towards where they'd been running. "Good thing too. I think the river's up ahead. Come on girl, let's see how our hero is doing."

"When we get back to the castle I'm having you put in stocks." Kela admonished him.

"If you say so."

Xhalya approached the exhausted drake, but she stopped about twenty yards away. The bristle neck glared at all three of them. It was too tired to continue chasing them, but it was still angry at them. Artair and Kela jumped down and walked towards it.

When it was clear that the drake wasn't going to attack, or try to chase them again they approached it. Kela ran to check on James, while Artair took a knee near the drake's head.

"I'll be damned." He said. "A black bristle neck. An adult too." He held his hand up next to it's jaw. "Gotta be damn near a full adult too. How's this thing been living this close to the capital?" He jumped back a bit when the drake tried to turn towards him.

"Worry about that later." Kela said as she pulled James from its back. He was weak, and the bruises she'd noticed before were worse now. His hands were stuck in a position like a crab claw. He drew his arms in and looked at her, one eye swollen shut. "Artair you have restraints in Xha's bags right?"

"Yeah of course." He replied.

"Go get them. We have to get this thing wrapped up before it regains its strength." She looked at James. "What were you doing you damn fool?"

"Nothing smart." James replied weakly. "Did we break it? Or are we dead?"

She looked at her burned legs, the rush of battle was starting to wear off, and the pain of the burns was finally starting to kick in.

"Little of both I think." She said.

"I think I might've broken a few bones." He said. Then he passed out.

"Yeah. I'm pretty sure you did." She admitted. She lifted him up off the ground, wincing at the pain in her legs. Then she carried him over to Xhalya and laid him down on the ground. Xhalya sniffed him, made a disgusted face, and then wrapped her tail around him protectively. "Take care of him Xha. He's important."

Artair hopped down from Xhalya's back, a large set of thick leather straps with buckles on them slung over both shoulders.

"You ready to tie this monster up? These straps will resize as soon as they touch it. And they're stronger than-"

"I know about your damn drake straps Artair." She said while rising to her feet. Her legs hurt so much. "Let's get this-" And then she collapsed.

"Great. I do all the work and then everyone else gets to take a nap." Artair said. Then he turned back to the exhausted bristle neck. "Well, big boy. Let's get you all nice and tied up."

The drake glared at him as he approached. But it couldn't do anything.

"Oh hell, let's pamper the young hero and do things the easy way." He pulled a small device from his pocket, aimed it at the sky, and it fired a loud whistling projectile into the sky. "Would've happened anyways."

Wait, is this just GATE? (25/?)

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Writer's note: There's some slight conversational confusion here. It's intentional. Bracketed speech means that it's not being translated for James's ears. It's that simple.

RODEO TIME! YEE-HAW

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James had never been beat up so badly in his life.

The drake had now rolled four separate times trying to get rid of him. The first time it had felt like he had been tackled by multiple linebackers in a game of football. The second time made him feel like he'd just been in a car wreck, bruised, bone sore, and muscles achy and wobbling. By the third and fourth time he had honestly begun to stop trying to quantify the pain occurring in his body.

It was pain, it was exhaustion, and it was the fear of what would happen if he let go.

Mercifully, after the fourth roll the drake decided to try a different tactic. Luckily it was one that James was actually okay with too. It began to buck up and down, jumping in the air, undulating and writhing, then slamming back down as hard as it could. James could handle that, he'd been to the country bars more than a few times back on his world, and he'd stayed on the mechanical bull at least twice.

It was almost a relief when the drake started bucking. James used the momentary weightlessness at the apex of each jump to reposition himself somewhat, to get his legs back on each side, to grip the fur better, to spread out a bit. The fact that the fur was startlingly soft only made it better. The sudden jarring impacts whenever the drake landed were less of a punch in the chest than they were the soft impact of a pillow in a pillow fight.

But the reprieve from the violence wasn't to last.

After the third buck the drake seemed to realize that it wasn't hindering him, but helping him. It reared it's head back, trying to snap at him to no avail. Then it paused, James scrambled to maintain his position. Then he felt something he'd been hoping the drake wouldn't think of.

The neck began puffing out, just like it had when the beast had been trying to sniff him out.

Under other circumstances James might have been impressed at how large the drake's neck could expand. It hadn't gone out this far while it was tracking him, that was certain. But now he thought the thing must have looked like a puffer-fish that felt threatened.

He struggled to hold on. But his legs were spread so far he felt like he was doing the splits. His hands struggled to hold the fur they'd latched onto and his arms felt like they were going to pop out of his shoulder sockets. James strained to maintain his grip.

And then the drake started to shake it's head.

James had no choice. He let go with his left hand. If he hadn't, the shaking would have caused more damage than any of the death-rolls would

have. But now his body was flailing all over the drakes inflated neck. He felt his right hand beginning to lose it's grip. His muscles were so sore.

Suddenly, he felt an impact. Something had slammed into the drake. It felt like a familiar impact too. The drake lost its concentration and it's neck began to deflate. Once again James had an opportunity to scramble up and regain his hold. Not that he really wanted to anymore. He half halfheartedly looked toward the direction the impact had come from.

She's alive? He thought. *Oh, thank fuck.*

"KELA!" He yelled.

She was running along the edge of the clearing. There was a trail of smoke coming off of her. She was moving fast.

"KELA!" He repeated. But the werewolf gave no sign that she heard him. "You have to get it to chase you!" At this, she turned to look at him for a moment. But there was no time to respond because the drake reared back and James felt the heat growing again.

No. Not this time motherfucker. James thought.

He reached out and grabbed two handfuls of fur. He pulled with every ounce of strength he had. This time he wasn't going for grip. He was inflicting pain.

But the drake didn't seem to mind too much and continued moving its head forward. James changed tactics. He searched around the back of the drakes head until he found what he was looking for. A small hole, about as big around as his thumb. He jammed his middle finger into the hole, and pulled with all his might.

This time, the drake responded.

It reared its head off to the side that James was pulling on, letting out a yelping roar filled with agony. The heat began dying down immediately and the beast began frantically clawing at James. He had to dodge the claws but still felt one brush against his back for a moment.

"Kela you have to get it to chase you! We have to tire it out! Artair said that's the only way to break them." But when he looked, only for a split second as he continued dodging claws, he noticed that she had that same head tilted, puzzled look on her face.

She doesn't understand what I'm saying. He thought. *But why? We've had no issue talking before.*

And then he understood.

"Dammit Artair. You fucking prick." He grumbled.

As if sensing that someone was talking about him, the prince and his drake crashed through the trees only ten yards or so away from Kela's position.

"Holy shits." The prince exclaimed. "The mad bastard is actually making a go of it."

"\[Artair, I can't understand him. He's yelled at me several times now but it's all gibberish.\]" Kela said.

Artair looked at her and noticed her scorched clothing, saw the raw redness on her legs. The right was scorched almost all the way from the feet to her waist, and the left leg was scorched almost to the knee. Her tail was curled up and smoking.

"Kela. Are you alright?"

"\[Do I look alright? Damn thing tried to torch me. I only got away by the skin of my fangs.\]" she responded.

That was when the two of them noticed that the drake hadn't made any noise in a moment. They looked back at it and saw that it was having a staring contest with Xhalya. James was clinging to it's neck, looking like he'd been through twenty rounds in a fighting pit.

He looked at them, raising his head slowly. "Guys. I can't do much more of this rodeo shit." He said, barely audible from where they were. "You gotta get it to chase you." Then he slumped back down.

"\[What did he say?\]" Kela asked. "\[I couldn't understand him.\]"

Artair took the green badge off his chest, slowly, and tossed it to Kela.

"Put that on. It's been translating for him, you can't speak to each other if one of you isn't wearing it." He looked at her. "Xha and I are going to make it mad. Once we do we're all, all three of us, going to have to make that thing chase us. If we don't it's just gonna go back to battering the poor lad to death."

Kela looked at James with concern, pinning the badge on absently, then she looked back at Artair. Her legs hurt worse than any injury she'd ever received before, but it was just a surface injury. She could do this.

"I can do that." She said.

"\[Alright than.\]" Artair replied. He looked back at the bristle neck. It was still having it's staring contest with Xhalya. He leaned towards her ear. "\[Girl. We've got a long day ahead of us.\]"

And then he kicked her sides, and she charged the wild drake. Artair drew his sabre. Kela charged too.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (24/?)

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James stood completely still as the massive drake approached him.

Fuck, what do I do? He wondered. *This wasn't part of the plan. Not that there was much of one to begin with. Fuck it.*

James stood up slowly. He very carefully set his feet shoulder width apart. He pulled the rope/net/lasso off his shoulder, it had sap all over it too. He held it in his right hand, ready to throw.

Time to improvise.

As the drake got close it's sniffing sped up, it's neck frill puffing rapidly, it's eyes still closed. Between how low it was to the ground, it's furred back, and the way it was sniffing, James had the impression of a large panther slowly moving towards him. That thought did not make him feel better about what he was going to do.

The drake was only about five feet away when James acted. He threw the net device as hard, and as quietly, as he could. It sailed past the drake's head and beyond it by about ten feet. As it passed the drake felt the wind movement and smelled the sap on the net. It jerked it's head back and immediately began tracking the movement of the net, taking a step towards it to smell it.

Then James managed to catch it by surprise.

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Kela saw James's approach from a distance, and only in little brief glimpses through the trees as she ran. She saw the bristle neck drake sniffing out James's location. Then she saw James standing and reaching for the net. Then some scrub brush got in her way and she lost sight for just a moment.

The next thing she saw was the bristle neck standing where James had been, head to the ground and clawed feet flailing at the ground.

She ran faster straining her muscles. She'd never run this far, or this hard before. She ignored the bushes and saplings that got in her way, crashing through them oblivious to the thorns and scratches they were causing.

Somehow the beast didn't notice her approach, noisy as it was. She assumed that it must have been too focused on mauling James.

As she entered the clearing she saw something that she couldn't completely comprehend. But her mouth acted before her brain could stop it.

"JAMES NOOO!!!!"

The drake's head snapped in her direction.

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James was amazed that he was alive right now. His plan had been a gamble honestly. There was no way to know if it was going to work. But he had evidence that the thing had a weakness.

He'd thrown the net as a distraction. When the drake had turned to see what it was he'd made his move.

He spread his hands as wide as he could. Then he'd pounced.

The drake had turned in his direction and began moving toward him to attack. but it was too late for that. Suddenly James's hands were buried deep in the fur around it's neck. He moved them back and forth as fast as he could, pressing his nails into the beast's smooth fur and agitating the skin underneath.

The effect was almost immediate. The drake's eyes closed, its lips pulling back on the side nearest to James. It's legs began shaking, sometimes kicking into the dirt.

That's right. James thought happily. *Nothing can resist THE SCRITCHES.*

The drake began to let out a low rumble that he recognized from when he'd almost angered Xhalya earlier. But this one was deeper and more relaxed. He couldn't help but think that it was purring.

If James was honest with himself, the drake stunk. It smelled pretty much like all the dead stuff that was around the clearing. What's worse is that the fur was getting stuck in the sap all over him. His hands were slowly getting coated in the stuff, and he was finding it hard to continue giving the scratches that were currently keeping the beast happy. It was as he was thinking about how he would solve this without letting up, that everything went wrong.

Suddenly there was a crashing noise and he heard Kela's voice scream his name followed by some kind of barking gibberish. He had just a minute to think, '*What is Kela doing here?'* before the drake snapped out of it's scritches based trance and turned it's head towards her.

She froze on the edge of the clearing, confused as to how James was just standing there with his hands on the drake's neck. *What is he doing?*

She thought. And then the drake began turning towards him, confusion on it's face.

James watched as it turned its massive head towards him. It looked at him with anger and confusion. It began opening its mouth and James felt a growing heat coming from it's chest.

Oh, crap. He thought. He began scratching its neck again, harder this time. But the drake wasn't falling for it this time. *Well, gamble failed.* So he did the only thing he could think of.

He began climbing.

The drake clearly didn't expect it. The heat in its chest lowered almost immediately. It also tried to snap at him, but he'd scrambled up too close to it's head for it to reach. It began trying to claw at him when Kela slammed into the other side of its neck, hitting it with a flying shoulder charge that honestly impressed the hell out of James.

She must've cleared at least ten feet. He thought as the drake reeled from the impact.

It turned to meet its new attacker, who had landed in a roll and was running to get out of the reach of its head. James used the opportunity to clamber further up. But the sap he was covered in was sticking to the fur. He felt like a fly in a fly trap. The drake began to thrash its head back and forth, trying to shake him off. He grabbed two handfuls of fur and tried to do the same with his feet, though that was much harder.

"Kela!" He screamed. She looked at him confused, head tilted to the side. "Get its attention. Then RUN!" But she just looked at him with that same confused look on her face.

And then the drake decided to roll.

James felt gravity shift as the drake flipped onto its side. Felt himself slam the ground with a loud thud. Felt himself stretch out and squash as the drake landed on top of him. The only thing that saved him was that he was on the drake's neck and not it's back. Even still the weight was crushing.

All he could do was hold on as it rolled back on it's feet. His feet meanwhile had slid off to the left side, shaken loose by the roll. The drakes claws tried to reach up to try and grab his legs and he had to scramble to get them back up out of reach. He felt one of the claws graze his left calf, felt blood pour from a long scratch that burned hot.

Then Kela slammed into it again. It turned to react, swiping with its claws, and charging in her direction. It pulled its head back, and James felt that building heat again.

"KELA RUN!!!" James yelled, while pulling back on the drake's fur as hard as he could.

And then it breathed fire.

It was hot. So hot that even being behind where the fire was being ejected he felt like he was being burned. It was also accompanied by a heavy black cloud of smoke. He was reminded of numerous diesel trucks that had "Rolled Coal" back in his world. But unlike that smoke, this smoke seemed to linger, almost seemed to drop to the ground and pool there.

When the drake stopped the breath attack James felt his heart sink.

Kela wasn't there anymore.

No. It can't be that hot. There's no way.

The drake roared, long and loud, and then it rolled again, and James couldn't think about Kela. He had to focus on surviving.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (23/?)

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James felt gross.

He'd taken the jacket off, he still didn't know where it'd come from, and was wearing just his pants and shirt now. He was covered in Vellal sap. It reeked of the disgusting old cat piss smell that his aunt Maria's house had smelled of in her later years, he'd hated visiting her house. He'd also rolled around in the dirt and foliage of the forest nearby to get himself some camo and more scent blocking.

Now he was about two hundred yards from the drake's lair.

The lair itself was a small hill that had had a large chunk dug out of its side. There was a tunnel going into the dugout part. A large tunnel.

And there were bones and other left-over bits of the drake's meals scattered about everywhere around it. He saw bones that looked to belong to cows, horses, goats, something that looked like a horse sized bird of some kind. He was fairly certain one of the skulls belonged to a mammoth, only it had a horn coming out of the forehead too. There were bones and scraps of rotten flesh and fur from all kinds of creatures.

And of course, there were human remains too. Some of them were still wearing armor.

James could smell all of it from where he was slowly moving forward. He'd felt sick before even heading down here, but now the smell was making him want to gag. But he couldn't, he had to stay as quiet as he could.

He could hear the beast in its lair. It was, he and the prince hoped, sleeping. There was a deep rumbling that cycled every ten seconds or so. Naturally it got louder as he got closer. But he didn't hear movement. So that was good.

As he got closer, he eventually neared the scratching tree and its pile of scraps. Sure enough it was roughly fifteen feet tall as he'd estimated.

Great, it is gonna be a massive ass monster. Awesome. James thought.

The wood pile was odd. The prince had pointed out the odd grey fuzz that had been all over it. As James got near it he saw the fuzz up close. Not that he needed to be near the wood pile to do so. The stuff was everywhere.

There was a lot of the stuff. It was light grey that seemed to border on blue, and it had no issue sticking to the sap that was all over James. To James it felt almost like cat's fur. It had reminded him of Aunt Maria's cat's again. But the individual hairs were long, some of them had to be close to a foot in length.

Wonder what the hell it ate to get this stuff all over the place. James wondered while continuing to slowly crouch his way across the open space.

The opening to the lair was only about fifty yards away now.

It was as he was wondering about the fur that he suddenly heard movement. He quickly, but quietly, made his way to a nearby carcass. He thought it might have once been a bull of some kind, and it smelled rancid.

And then, the drake emerged from it's lair.

Oh shit. James thought. *The fur isn't from a kill. It's because the damn thing is a variant.*

The prince had told him about variants. Variants were incredibly rare drakes often significantly more dangerous than their normal cousins. And James was looking right at one.

Sure enough, it was big. The prince's drake, ground to head, was at least fifteen feet tall standing up, and she was one of the largest creatures James had ever seen in his life. The drake in front of him was nearly forty. It's fur was a dark, dark, purple bordering on black. And around its neck was a mane of fur that looked just like the kind strewn around the open area, though it was darker. The mane covered most of its neck, starting at the base of its head, and seemed to have a trail going down the drakes back, almost to the tail.

He mentioned something about these ones. Brush necks? Brush backs? Something like that. James thought, trying to stay as still as he could. *I know that at a minimum it's gonna be meaner than normal. but there was something else unique about them. What was it.*

The drake looked around at the area, sniffing. It yawned, exposing a set of teeth that were practically obsidian. James thought, somewhat grimly, that they'd make excellent daggers.

Then it lowered its nose to the ground and sniffed deeply. When it did, the hair on its neck puffed out suddenly, kicking up the dirt and dust near the beast's head. After a second the drakes head swung in James's direction.

Oh Right. He remembered suddenly. *They're the ones with the best sense of smell.*

And then the beast began plodding towards him, sniffing and puffing its neck as it did. But not looking at him.

Prince Artair had seen the drake emerge from its lair. He knew what was about to happen and he didn't want to see it first hand.

Bad luck getting a bristle neck. He thought. *Hopefully I can find Chep before he tells anyone what we were planning on doing. Don't want to have to answer to the clan or Dad about this.*

It was as he was packing up his belongings in Xhalya's saddlebag that Artair thought he heard something.

He paused, listening for a moment, but he didn't hear it again. He walked over to Erny to get the horse tied to Xhalya then he heard it again.

^("ARTAAAAIR!!!")

He turned, looking around and thought he saw something running over the next hill. The hill that was on his way back to the city. He pulled his looking glass back out and aimed at the running thing. Behind him, Xhalya was getting excited, her spines flexing and her feet stamping. She was happy.

"ARTAIR! DON'T EVEN TRY IT!" She was a lot closer now.

"Ah, shit." Artair said, lowering the glass and scrabbling up Xha's side. Erny could stay here for all he cared. "C'mon Xha let's go!" He kicked the sides of the Drake, who began moving toward the hill and city. "NO! Not that way!" He exclaimed.

But it was too late.

A raging ball of fur and anger tackled him off the side of his mount. He landed with a thud and a grunt. He heard a crunching noise that he was fairly certain was the looking glass being crushed beneath him.

Kela on the other hand landed in a roll, springing to her feet almost immediately and rounding on him. As he rolled onto his back, she placed her foot on his chest, holding him down.

What was there to do? He couldn't attack her, she was the captain of the guard, he had no silver weapons, and if he did his sister would kill him. So he raised his hands in mock surrender.

"You got me K." He said with a grin. "I've been poaching these woods for days now, bring me in. Although they're my father's woods so I don't think the charges will stick."

"Knock off the jokes. WHERE'S JAMES?" She asked, panting heavily.

"Who?" He asked incredulously. "Who's James? You cheating on Jurl?"

She drew her sword and held it's point on his chest, it dug into his jacket a bit. "WHERE. IS. HE?" She poked the green medallion that he'd gotten from James's uniform jacket, he knew he should've put it in his bags. "I've already talked to Chep. Tell the truth."

"Dammit Chep." The prince relented. "Sorry K. He's probably already dead."

"What do you mean?" She asked, worry on her face.

"Well." He said, taking the looking glass out, sure enough it was broken. "I'd show you, but your little tackle broke my looking glass. Bad luck really, who'd've thought there was a bristle neck in these woods?"

"WHAT?" She asked. "You sent him, AGAINST A BRISTLE NECK!?!"

Kela had hoped to find James still with the prince. She'd also hoped to finally get the chance to rest for a moment.

But instead she had to begin running again. No time for further questions. She followed her nose.

"Well." The prince said after she'd run off. He picked himself up and dusted himself off, tossing the broken glass over his shoulder. "They're both dead."

He turned around and was about to climb up Xhalya's side again when the drake put her head directly in front of him. Where before she had seemed excited, probably to see Kela he thought. Now she looked sad.

"Hey, she's the one that went running off towards an angry bristle neck, and a black one at that." He said. "Not my fault."

The drake continued with the sad face.

"No. We're not gonna fight a bristle neck. That thing is twice your size girl."

The drake did not relent, and when he tried to walk around her head she moved to keep it between them.

"NO. We're not gonna do it."

Xhalya let out a long sad whimper. It was as pathetic as a fifteen-foot-tall lizard could possibly sound or look.

Artair shook his head, hands on his hips. He shook his finger at the beast.

"No. And that's final. I'm not dying, or getting you killed, because of some fool who let liquor make his decisions. That's all there is to it."

She flopped onto the ground, and actually began sniffling through her nostrils, whining the whole time.

Artair hated that this was actually working on him. He bit his lip and let out a long exasperated sigh.

"Why the hell do you love Kela so much? Doesn't make any gods damned sense." He said as he reluctantly began walking towards their inevitable deaths. "COME ON THEN! You big faker."

Xhalya got up and jogged up next to him, tail wagging.

"If we die, I'm gonna become a ghost and then I'm gonna tell my dad to turn you into boots for the entire Guard."

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Wait, is this just GATE? (22/?)

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Writer's note; Sorry if you missed me yesterday. Yesterday was a brown letter day. Never trust the chicken from the DFAC. We're fleshing out drakes today. James is in for a helluva rodeo. YEEHAW!

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It was mid-day by the time James and Prince Artair reached the view overlooking the Drake's lair. It had taken James a while to figure out how to get Erny the horse moving again. It took a little longer than that to get caught up to the prince on his drake Xhalya as well. Once he was

moving though, Erny taking a nice easy canter, James found himself oddly comfortable in the horse's saddle. Despite that it was clearly made for Chep's much larger size.

He and the prince discussed what James would need to do to successfully approach, subdue, mount, and then ride the wild drake. All that was left was getting there, equipping James as needed, and then the task itself.

Drakes, it seemed, were largely solitary beasts, often only meeting long enough to mate or fight, and then leaving back to their respective nests or lairs. There were many different types of drake too. The easiest distinction between them being their colors. The could have many different colors, red, green, and blue were the most common, but there were also black, white, brown, and the incredibly rare yellow. The colors also warned of their breath attacks and ferocity.

All drakes breathed fire, with the exception of white drakes which were actually amphibious and lived in swamps. These would actually stun prey with electrical discharges that James recognized from electric eels, but their water borne nature made fire all but useless. The main difference in breath between the other colors was mainly one of temperature, with red drakes having the lowest temperature breath attack and yellow drakes having the highest.

Size-wise the smallest drakes were usually the browns, and the largest were the black drakes. Though the prince emphasized that drakes were also effectively immortal, and never truly stopped growing. While a brown drake might reach adulthood and only be slightly bigger than a draft horse, if it lived long enough it could grow to truly monstrous sizes. There were legends from centuries past of drakes reaching the size of mountain ranges. These were estimated to be remnants from the creation of the world though, and most had been killed. Though according to Artair there was a blue drake in the far north that was nearly three times Xhalya's size. He'd seen it himself. It's rider was one of the highest ranking members of clan Drakrid.

None, absolutely none, of this information made James feel any better about what lay ahead.

If anything he was feeling sick. It wasn't the hangover either. He'd eventually relented and drank the yellow potion, something the prince called Revlex, and had almost immediately felt better. The stuff had tasted like motor oil, but his hangover had almost immediately disappeared.

Now the two of them were standing on a small hill, overlooking a small clearing about half a mile away. Xhalya and Erny were both behind them, Erny tied to a tree and eating grass, Xhalya sleeping curled up like a giant spiked dog.

James and the prince stood on the hill top handing the looking glass back and forth as the prince pointed out different signs of the Drake's presence, and different hints about how big it would be. It wasn't looking good.

James was feeling sicker and sicker with each detail.

"See that tree that looks like it's been turned into a giant spike? All chewed to a point?" prince Artair asked. "Right next to the giant pile of splinters."

"Yeah." Said James.

"That's it's scratching spot. It breaks the tree in half and then chews it to that point. That way if it's belly itches it can stand over the broken tree and scratch with it. Then it'll roll around in the pile of splinters to scratch it's back." The Prince smiled. "Must be a properly large beast to knock a tree like that over. Probably at least five or ten feet taller than Xha there."

James gulped. "Yeah." The tree in question, though broken in half, was still at least ten feet tall or so. "Pretty big." He agreed.

"Wonder what the grey stuff in the pile is? Looks almost like fur. Must be from one of it's kills." The prince added.

"So uh... What do these things eat?" James asked.

"Pretty much anything that comes near em, really." Artair replied. "Well, maybe not really small stuff. Squirrels and birds and things probably aren't worth their time. But other than that, if it moves, it's a meal."

"So people."

"Well, of course." The prince said nonchalantly.

"Okay. Go over this with me again." James said. "First; I douse myself in tree sap."

"Vellal tree sap. I'll help you with that part."

"Right." James said. "Vellal tree sap. That keeps it from smelling me."

"Don't forget." The prince interupted. "No boots. Bare feet only."

"Right, no shoes. Why again?

"To stay silent. Plus, once you mount the thing ^(-assuming you live that long-) You'll need your feet free." Artair answered. "Until you have a saddle it's spikes will be the easiest way to ride it. But boots will slide right off."

"Got it." James didn't like the no shoes part. "Then I sneak up on it."

"At first just move low and slow, don't let it see you. The sap should help with camoflage, you'll just have to roll around a bit first."

"God I'm gonna need to bathe for a week after this." James muttered.

"If you survive."

"WOULD YOU STOP SAYING THAT?" James hissed.

"Just being realistic." The prince chuckled. "Now, once you get close....."

"Only move when I hear it breathing, or moving."

"Or else?" Artair prompted.

"Swift, painful death."

"Well." The prince said. "A fight at least. Make a showing of your skills at least, hero."

"Right. But I'll be fighting a thirty foot tall, fire breathing, monster. So BEING REALISTIC," James said sarcastically.

"See, now you're getting it."

"ONCE.... I'm close enough." James interrupted. "Use this." James held up the weird net/lasso/muzzle that the prince had given him.

"Yes. Get it around the beast's mouth." The prince checked the device for the fourth time. "It'll snag on the drake's spikes and teeth. Keep it from opening it's mouth. Then once it's distracted by that you use the rope," He held the rope portion up. "To climb up. Then whip it around the beast's neck and pull tight."

James closed his eyes and winced. "Then hold onto the rope, the net straps, and wedge my feet under some of its spikes and hold on for dear life."

"That last part is literal." Artair added.

"Yeah, no shit." James rebuked. "How long do I have to ride this thing before it gives up?"

"As long as it takes." The prince replied. "Or as long as you still consider your life worth living."

"How long did it take for you to break Xha?"

The prince thought for a moment. "Well, by the time we were done, I was so exhausted I'd lost track. But if I had to guess.... About five hours."

James slouched at the idea. "Dude? FIVE HOURS?"

"In fairness, she was young. Young drakes have tons of energy."

"Fuuuuuck, duuuuude." James plopped onto his ass, pouting. "Can I at least get a GOOD night's sleep first?"

"I mean. You can." The prince said unconvincingly "But I definitely won't be sleeping in the feeding territory of a wild drake."

James let out a long groan. Then he stood up. "Okay, show me what a Vellal tree looks like. Let's get this over with."

"Aaaaah, that's a hero for you!" The prince exclaimed.

"I hate you so much."

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Kela was still running.

It had taken her a while but after about three hours she had finally managed to get to the outskirts of the city. Numerous shouts, laughs, and calls had followed her. After all it wasn't every day that a werewolf AND the captain of the guard was seen flying through the city like that.

She'd also had to stop several times to pick the scent up again. James's scent was easy to pick out, having smells that weren't common in this world. But he also practiced good hygiene, so it wasn't very strong.

The prince on the other hand had a very strong odor, especially from his trademark cigar smoke. But unlike James, his scent was just like half the other scents in the city. She'd almost lost him when travelling through the market place. She guessed that he'd likely stopped for supplies, and part of that had included stopping at the cigar vendor.

But as she neared the edge of town the scents had become easier to pick out. Both scent trails were easy to distinguish from the smells of the caravans and livestock, though those other smells were much stronger.

Either way, she kept on running.

She'd gotten about five miles out of town when she saw someone familiar staggering toward the city.

"Chep!" She yelled, still running. "Where is he you four-armed belly shower?!?!"

Chep was still raising his head when she tackled him.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (21/?)

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"Woah woah woah, hold up." James said. "I can't ride a freaking dragon!"

"Drake. Seriously, I've said it like ten times now, and that's just since you've woken up." The prince replied while putting the saddle on the horse.

"Drake. Whatever. I'm not gonna get killed trying to ride one."

"Well honestly if you're already riding it, than you're probably fine." The prince replied. "It's the mounting and breaking part that are dangerous."

"Wait, what do you mean? Is it wild?" James asked.

"Well of course it's wild." The prince scoffed. "You can't ride a tamed drake. If it didn't kill you, it's rider would." He finished tightening the saddle. "Where'd the other one go?"

"So you're just gonna throw me at a wild monster with ZERO information. And then you expect me to jump on it's back, ride it until it gives up, and then keep it as a pet? All without dying?" James asked, incredulously.

"Honestly. I don't even expect you to get past the first step." The prince replied. "As for what I'm doing? I'm simply showing you where the thing is. Your sense of honor is doing the rest. I'll be sitting on Xhalya half a mile away watching through a seeing glass and probably laughing my ass off."

"My sense of honor?"

"Well. Yeah. You insulted a prince. Insulted the merit of Drakrid. Boasted of your skill as a rider. And then you insulted me a bunch more times." The prince mused. "In fairness you were incredibly drunk. but as the saying goes, 'bills writ in wine are oft payed in pain'. So here we are."

"What does that even mean?" James asked.

"It means that being drunk is no excuse for being an ass." The prince replied. "Look, you can do this. Or you can answer to Xhalya." He pulled a small bottle full of something yellow from one of the saddle bags. "Here drink this. It'll help with the hangover."

"What? No. I'm not drinking anything anyone hands me anymore." James said, pushing away the bottle. "And so what, you'll feed me to your horse?"

"Huh? Oh. Oh no, Xhalya isn't a horse." He patted the horse on the nose. "This is Erny. He's Chep's horse. Poor guy." He let out a loud warbling

whistle followed by a loud whooping noise. "This is Xhalya." James felt the ground rumbling.

"What's that?"

"A little taste of the future." Prince Artair was smiling devilishly. James began backing away from the man and the horse. The rumbling grew louder.

Suddenly a massive spiked lizard came sprinting over the nearby hill and ran straight towards them. It was at least fifteen feet tall and had a faint blue color to it's scales. And right as James was about to start running he realized that it had a saddle on it's back. It also had a pair of hooved legs sticking out of it's mouth. It stopped just in front of the prince and lowered it's head.

"XHA!!!" The prince yelled angrily. He took one of the hooved legs into his hand, and the giant lizard actually, at least in James's mind, seemed scared. "Xha, how many times have I told you NOT to eat the horses?"

The lizard. *No.* James thought. *That's a drake. Holy shit.* Actually cowered a little, it's long spiked tail curling up next to it, as the prince berated it.

"Ah man. We stole that from the castle stables girl. Now we'll have to pay for a replacement." He punched the drake on the nose. Not that it seemed to do much. "Dammit Xha, I've told you about this! NO HORSES!" He scolded the drake.

Xhalya did something James never would have expected from a fifteen foot drake. It used textbook puppy dog eyes, and nuzzled up to the prince. It would have been cute, had it not been for the horse legs stuck in its teeth. Apparently it worked though, because prince Artair began hugging and petting the massive creatures head.

James was feeling, and exhibiting, a lot of emotions. Chiefly, confusion.

"It's like a giant scaled dog." James said to himself. "That you can ride, and has foot long claws and teeth."

Prince Artair noticed the look on his face. "So, this is Xhalya, I call her Xha Xha." She nuzzled him again and he scratched under her eye. "She.... is a drake."

James hadn't noticed himself moving towards them. He reached out his hand without even realizing it. Suddenly Xhalya let out a low rumble, and James felt a growing heat in the air.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." Artair said, not even looking at James.

James pulled his hand back. "No petting?"

"Not if you want to keep your arm. When drakes bond, they bond hard." He walked over to James, grabbed his wrist and pulled it toward the drakes nose. The drake was still rumbling, but the heat died down. Artair let go and James began to pet and scratch the drakes nose. He got near one of it's nostril slits and the drake leaned into his hand, closing its eyes.

^("Oh this is so fuckin' cool.") James said to himself. "She's so warm. I kinda thought they'd be cold blooded."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Cause they're reptiles, I guess." James said. He began scratching higher and higher on the drake's head. "Just. I don't know."

"Drakes, dragons, wyrms, wyverns. Long as they aren't white they'll be warm." The prince rubbed the drake's flank. "They carry fire within them. Hottest stuff around. Not many things can survive it."

James was too amazed to be scared right now. As terrifying as the creature in front of him was, it was still an amazing and magnificent thing to see in person.

It's scales looked blue from a distance, but up close he could see a faint iridescence to them. They seemed to change from blue to a faint purple to an almost green color, depending on what angle he looked at them. They also seemed to almost flex at his touch. They would start out rigid when he first touched them, but then as he petted and scratched they would soften and move. The warmth of the creature was incredible, it was like being next to a space heater.

"This is the kind of thing I'm going to ride?" He asked. The new info about their fire fresh within his mind.

"If you're lucky." The prince answered. "And if you're tough."

"I'm gonna need a lot more info on how to do this, aren't I?" James asked.

"Oh yeah." The prince responded. He gestured at the still snoring cyclops. "Chep'll be fine, he'll sleep this off and then when he sees us gone he'll head back to the castle." He pointed at the remaining horse. "There's some rations in the saddle bags, and I'd still suggest drinking that Revlex. Mount up, we've got about fifteen more miles before we get there." Then the prince stepped up into Xhalya's saddle and began riding off slowly.

James turned back to the remaining horse, grimacing as he did so.

Fuck. Am I doing this? He thought. *Oh god, this is terrible. Imma die. Imma die, or I'm gonna get a giant, scaly, fire puppy that probably tries to eat Kela and any horse nearby.* He paced back and forth for a little bit, crouched, rubbed his hands through his hair. "Fuuuuuuuuck! Okay. I'm okay. Just gonna get myself killed, or eaten by Xhalya if I decline. No big deal."

He stood up, walked over to the horse, untied it, planted a foot in the stirrup and mounted the saddle.

"Ok, drunk me did this. But how the fuck do I make you move." He sat for a minute. Then he turned towards the prince. "HEY! HOW DO YOU GET THIS THING MOVING?"

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Kela was running, and fast.

Prince Artair was, she knew from personal experience, trouble. He was the odd one out in the royal family. The second child, not in line for the throne, but also not a political person to begin with. He had chosen a life of adventure and danger. One that now involved James.

In essence, he'd rebelled against the family and struck out on his own. Not openly. He had no plans for usurping the throne or anything. He simply didn't like being constrained to the life expected of him.

It was no wonder that he'd gone out to ride a drake when he turned seventeen. And now he was beholden to stupid Drakrid clan law.

Dammit. Kela thought as she continued running. *Why'd it have to be him? Of all people. Stupid, cigar smoking, fool.*

She'd stopped at the nearest guard post in the wall to send message to the princess about her discovery and to inform her of the fact that Kela was on the trail. She'd thrown together a makeshift travel bag from the two guard's gear and she'd taken off, following the scents of both James and the prince.

And now she was running.

Numerous townsfolk were startled and had to jump out of her way as she made her way through the town. She shouted warnings to ensure that nobody got hurt. She even leapt over them from time to time, and vaulted over carts and stalls that were in the way.

Her last name was Swiftrunner, and the prince (and James) would learn why.

God I hope Artair doesn't get James killed doing something stupid.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (20/?)

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Writer's note: Big ole number 20. First time I've ever devoted to a series that well. Hell yeah. Anyways, time to start leaning EVEN HARDER into the fantasy part of the story. Don't worry, James will still deal with the emotional stuff. Let it happen naturally.

Enjoy.

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Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuck! Was James's first thought upon waking.

His head pounded, and his eyes ached at the light of day. He was hungover. No, this was worse. He was dying. He groaned loudly.

"Water..... Gatorade..... something. Please." He begged pitifully. He rolled over slowly, head throbbing at the effort.

Wait, this isn't a bed. He thought. *Where am I?* He opened his eyes. Well, he opened them more than a squint anyways. It took a moment, and a lot of eye strain, but things came into view. *Where the hell am I?* He thought again.

He was lying on the ground for starters. The dirt and stones were doing no favors to his back, the roll onto his side had revealed that much. He was also cold. But as he looked around he saw a small fire that looked to be on it's last legs.

He slowly crawled over to it, not noticing the person watching him from the log lying only feet from the fire. He curled up next to the small fire it's small guttering flames and warm coals barely warming him at all.

He lay that way for a while. He slowly, very slowly, warmed up, bit by bit. At one point he reached out and threw some twigs and sticks into the fire that had been sitting near his head. He piled the rest up as a makeshift pillow while the fire flared a bit.

What did I drink last night? He wondered. He vaguely half remembered Kraug coming up and handing him a pint of something that had looked green. He'd said something about telling him of the late Sergeant. That had been after the funeral pyre, as he had sat brooding near the King's entourage. He'd taken a large swig and everything afterwords had become a drunken blur. *What was in that cup?* He pondered.

It was as he was thinking of this that the person sitting behind him began to stir. James stiffened. How long had someone been there? When it was clear that the person was moving away from him he turned, rolling slowly onto his sore back and looking their way.

The person, whoever they were, was staggering. They were very clearly still drunk, and nearly stumbled as they passed the log they'd been sitting on. They were tall. It was hard to tell from his position on the ground, but he guessed they were at least six foot six. He was unsure, his eyes were still blurry and sore, but he noticed something odd about the coat the person was wearing as well.

"Hey." He called out. Though he didn't know why. "Hey... dude. Do you have four arms?" The words came out of his mouth before his brain had even finished

The stranger turned back to him, struggling to stay upright. "Blag-mahna, D'korria!" They slurred. Then they fell over backwards with a jarring impact. James felt the ground shake a little bit from the impact.

"Hey!" James said as he struggled to get up. "Hey, you alright man?" *What the hell did he just say?*

James stood, wobbled a bit, braced himself, and then slowly staggered over to the fallen goliath of a person. As he did he looked down and noticed that he wasn't wearing his jacket, but rather some kind of brown canvas jacket. It kind of reminded him of a Carhartt or something, but it had some kind of greenish brown fur on the lapels. It was also at least one size too large for him. When had he gotten that?

When he got up to the fallen person, it did take a minute to get there, he saw that they had a face unlike any he'd ever seen. For starters they only had one eye. They also had tusks like Kraug, only they had four of them, upper and lower it looked like.

And yeah, definitely four arms too.

Great. James thought. *Now there are Goros in this world. What next? Insect people? Shape shifters? God, why do I have to be hungover while learning about this?*

If anything, the thought actually helped him wake up for a bit. He grabbed the cyclops's arm and tried to shake them. But it was to no avail. Whatever the thing was it weighed significantly more than James did. It was also beginning to snore.

Wonder what it said before it zonked out? He wondered. *Oh well, time to figure out where I am.*

He looked around, eyes slowly focusing more and more, head still pounding. A noise alerted him to the presence of a horse, tied to a tree nearby. He approached the horse cautiously. The horse seemed to pay him no mind, continuing to munch on the tree branches and grass casually.

"Okay.... Did I ride a horse to get here last night?" He asked the air. "Is there a saddle? Saddles have bags right? You see one boy? Or girl?" He asked the horse.

After a few minutes of searching, and stumbling around, he found the saddle. Sure enough, next to it was a set of saddle bags. They had a weird symbol on them, it looked like an angry dragon face surrounded by a field of lightning bolts. "That'd make a dope Yakuza tattoo or something." James said aloud.

"What would?" A voice said from behind him. James froze. That was not a voice he knew. "Oh, our clan crest? Well, I don't know what a YOK-OO-ZAH is. But indeed it does make a fantastic tattoo."

James slowly turned around and saw a man standing about ten yards away. They were wearing pair of, what looked like, steel leg plates and a short leather jacket with steel shoulder guards. On their hip was what looked like a pirate's cutlass, and in their hand was what James easily recognized as a cigar, though it looked blue. On the lapel of the jacket was the badge the king had given James. He had long wavy brown hair and looked oddly familiar to James for some reason. He was also pulling his shirt open a bit to show a tattoo on his collar bone that, sure enough, matched the symbol on the saddle bags.

"So the man of the hour is finally awake?" The man asked, puffing lightly on the cigar as he released his shirt collar.

James's head was remarkably clear all of a sudden. Without realizing it he'd crouched a little, entering a stance that would let him charge or run at a moment's notice. He reached for a holster that wasn't there.

"Where am I?" He asked. He glanced around looking for a weapon. Any weapon.

The man puffed the cigar again, letting out a ring of smoke that wavered strangely. "About twenty miles outside the city." He said, matter of factly.

"How'd I get here? And who are you?" James asked. He gestured at the sleeping cyclops. "And who or what the hell is that thing?"

"Oh that's just Chep. He's just a Tax'lor. As for how you got here." He puffed the cigar again. "Well you came riding with us."

"No. No I was drinking with Kraug and Kela and those guys. I was in no state to-" He gestured at the horse. "RIDE anything. I've never even ridden a horse. And seriously. WHO ARE YOU?"

The man nodded, raising his eyebrows. "Well, yeah you definitely weren't in any state to ride. I even tried telling you that." He puffed the cigar again. "But you insisted. And Kela and Kraug were about eight flagons deep in a game of Toss'em."

"What?" James asked. "What the fuck is- No. WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU!"

"Ah hell, hero." The man grinned devilishly. "I'm Prince Artair the second." He did a very sarcastic bow.

"Prince?" What the hell was a prince doing here. "Wait... Prince as in... King Farrick's son?"

"Well, yeah. Princes are the sons of kings and queens on your world, aren't they?"

"Well." James was incredibly confused. "What the hell are we doing out here. Why did you bring me here."

"Well that's easy Mr. Choi." The prince chuckled. "You said you wanted to become a Drake Rider like me." At this he showed the tattoo again. "You said, 'If a sissy like you can ride a dragon, than there's no way that it's that difficult'." He said this part in an incredibly mocking voice. "Then you and Chep insulted me a few more times and you INSISTED that we take you to the nearest dragon's lair."

"Hold up." James had a bad feeling about this. "So your.... saying that we're on our way to ride a dragon?"

"Well, I told you last night, it's a drake." The prince clarified. "As for what we're going to do. I'm going to watch you TRY to ride a drake. Realistically you're just going to get mauled to death and then roasted like a Felavian Pheasant." The prince puffed the cigar again. "But if you don't, then yeah pretty much." He puffed again. "Oh, yeah. If you manage to succeed." He showed the tattoo again. "You'll officially be a member of the Drakrid clan."

Oh fuck. James thought. *Fuck you, drunk me. You always make the worst decisions.*

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Kela had spent all morning looking for James. She'd smelled his scent all over the castle and she was beginning to worry.

She'd last seen of him hanging out with some of the castle guards. She'd been pretty well into the moon brew at that point but she had been pretty sure she'd heard James discussing something called ARE-TILL-AIRY with the two soldiers.

She had been about to go over and talk to him, and hear more of his stories about his fallen comrade when Kraug had surprised her by wrapping her in his arms and launching her into the air. If she'd been sober she would have chewed him out the second she landed. But when she was drunk Toss'em was one of her favorite games. And Kraug was one of the best tossers in the guard. She'd lost track of James as the game had continued. It was a reckless game, one that humans and other "fragile" races couldn't even play. But it was so fun.

But as fun as that had been, losing track of James was a problem. After hours of searching she'd only been able to find his uniform jacket. It smelled so strongly of him that it actually made her think she'd found

him. Instead she found a piece of clothing draped over a discarded chair in the courtyard near the guard's canteen.

But there was something worse. A smell that she recognized and really hoped didn't belong to who she thought it did. If it did it could mean trouble.

She rushed over to the armory, James's Jacket clenched in her hand. She knocked on the shuttered window. She waited a moment before knocking again, this time she heard the trademark clanging and swearing of Kraug. She waited anxiously.

"Who the hell is it?" Kraug bellowed from inside. There was a loud banging as something heavy fell. "Saints in the ten hells! What do ya want out there?"

"Kraug it's Kela. Open up." She replied.

There was more clanging and cursing getting closer to the window. After another minute there was a lound slam on the back of the window. "Wif ya in just a sec Kel." Kraug said somewhat pitifully. Then she heard the latches on the back of the window being undone. The window opened and Kraug was on the other side of it. "What's goin on? You here as tha Cap'n or as Kel?" He was kneeling on the other side of the counter and had his head propped up on his arms.

"Right now? Both." She said. "Do you know where James is? I can't find him."

"Little hero done run off huh? Figures."

"Kraug!" She exclaimed.

"Alright alright." She could smell the Venom Slag that orcs loved so much on his breath. "When did I last see him?" The large orc asked himself while resting his head propped up on the counter. He started to doze off.

"KRAUG!" Kela yelled.

"What!?!" He asked while almost falling off the counter.

"WHERE. DID YOU. SEE JAMES!?!?" She slowly shouted at him.

"He was talkin' to Arty." The orc admitted. "He was chit chatting wif prince Arty. Two of em seemed right chummy." Then the orc finally slipped back off the counter and began snoring.

That was NOT what Kela had wanted to hear.

"Shit." She said.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (19/?)

[previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qmqhx2/wait_is_this_just_gate_18/) / [first](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/)

Writer's note: ya'll can be some real bloodthirsty mf'ers. chill.

Also if I'd accurately portrayed the US government they would've just assumed that James went AWOL/did-some-dumb-shit and probably sent MP's looking for him in Vegas. If I start portraying the government accurately this story gets boring.

For the rest of you. Enjoy :-)

\~

The talk between King Farrick and Colonel Muhammed took a long time. Nearly four hours according to James's phone. He acted as the translator that whole time. They only stopped once James's phone reached 5% battery.

The two respective leaders discussed the reasoning for the summoning. They talked about how the summoning worked. That led to a long conversation about magic and naturally (at least when it comes to the summoning), the gods as well. Veliry weighed in when it came to that part of the discussion. The King would cough whenever she got overexcited, then she would slow down.

The Colonel tried to learn about the land in this new world. The King spoke freely, about MOST things. He didn't give specifics on the size of the population, or the nature of the different species that lived there. He only revealed that there were a great many different kinds of people that called his nation home. He also revealed that his nation was vast. James couldn't remember how big America was size-wise, but if the King's estimation was accurate then Petravus was bigger than the U.S. But he didn't interject with that thought.

The King also didn't allow Veliry to give too much information about magic. Any time she started to get too in depth the King would give one of those coughs and Veliry would pull back a bit, slow back down, and stop oversharing.

James was actually glad about this. Translating was harder work than he'd ever thought it would be. Veliry's excitement and the King's slight, yet obvious, OPSEC practices were also stressing for James.

The Colonel on the other hand was practically unreadable. She seemed to share things that James didn't expect her to share, and held back when he expected her to stay open. She outright told the King that America by itself had half a billion citizens. She openly discussed the fact that there were weapons that could kill a person on the other side of the world, snipers that could covertly kill from a mile away, and bombs that

could erase cities, vehicles that could carry troops thousands of miles in mere hours.

In short. She was bragging. She was doing everything in her power to let the King know just how big of a stick the Army had access to. She was threatening Petravus.

This was even more stressful for James. He'd never been a big fan of his country's posturing in world politics. Now it was doing it in multiversal politics.

For what it was worth, the King was apparently accustomed to this. James supposed that made sense. He was a king, odds are he'd been threatened by other countries in this world plenty of times. Being threatened by someone that was separated from you by an entire universal boundary must be somewhat less than terrifying. James certainly didn't feel like the threats were all that intimidating. After all, what use is a nuke when it can't even get to it's target?

Eventually the discussion got to one James had been hoping to be a part of. What James was expected to do, what he was summoned for. The King had avoided the topic thus far. James had been annoyed at it before. But now the King didn't have a lot of options other than to reveal the truth.

\---

James flopped onto his bed.

He was exhausted.

He was stressed beyond belief.

And he was confused.

He rolled over onto his back. *What the fuck am I supposed to do about that?* He wondered, while staring at the ceiling with dread in his heart. *What the fuck is a random wrench monkey grunt with half a nursing degree supposed to do about that?*

"Kela?" He asked.

She was sitting at the table in her room. But the door between the rooms was open. So she heard him just fine.

"Yeah?"

"What the fuck is vanishing blight?" He asked. "And if it's a big enough threat that you performed a supposedly world saving ritual, then what the hell am I expected to do about it?"

"Did you not hear the King describe it?"

"I did..... why didn't you guys tell me about it before?" He asked.

"I don't know the King's reasoning. But he gave explicit instructions not to tell you until he had." She replied. "I don't think he knows how to speak of it. Most of the higher ups don't. It's.... a terrifying issue."

"Noooooo. You don't say." He said sarcastically.

"How would you tell someone that your world was fading?" She asked, slightly angry. "That parts of it- seemingly random parts of it- were simply fading away?" She paused. "How do you tell someone that that's what they've had their life turned inside out to fix?"

Probably the same way that I would tell you that I have no fucking idea what I even can do about it. He thought.

"So basically you guys had no idea what you could do about it. So you did the only thing left to do?" He asked.

"Yes." she replied.

"And I was the answer? Or at least the answer the gods gave you?" James asked.

"....Yes."

"And I'm guessing that once you guys had had a chance to check me out, question me, see that I was just a regular person. I was a bit of a disappointment." He continued.

"James you're-"

"What?" James interrupted. "Not a disappointment? Don't try to tell me that a normal human with no magic and only a soldier's gear was what you guys had been hoping for?"

"It's not that simple."

"No." He agreed. "No. I'm starting to get that now. I'd already known that when you explained the summoning. But now that I know the reasoning it's become even more concrete in my mind."

"Well..." She said, arms crossed. Time to be a captain. "Do you want to sit there and whine about it? Or do you want to go see what it is? Maybe see if you can figure out what it is?"

"As a soldier I believe that I can do both simultaneously." He sighed. "But seriously Kela. I'm just a grunt. I don't think I'm the guy for this."

"Maybe not." She admitted. "But the god's emissary told us to follow your lead. And to learn from them. Maybe that last part is talking about your government." She thought for a moment. "I mean. They are stopping at nothing to get you back. Literally breaking through the periphery through

sheer scientific might and stubbornness. That is an impressive feat. And they're doing it solely to find and retrieve you."

"Absolutely ridiculous if you ask me." James said to himself. "Probably just want you guys' oil or something. I'm just an excuse."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Just joking to try to release some pressure." He admitted. He closed his eyes for a moment, shook his head. "I think we should ask the gods if they know what the fuck they're doing."

"We've tried that."

"What?" He asked.

"We've tried that. We've performed the rites of celestial, eldritch, and fell emissary summoning." She said, a look of disgust on her face at the last two. "We've asked them for further guidance. Asked them for confirmation that you were the one they thought we needed."

"And?"

She rubbed her neck, shook her head a bit. "The celestial and eldritch emissaries didn't even appear. And the fell Emissary just laughed and said 'good luck'. before it disappeared."

What the fuck? James thought. "Well what the hell does any of that mean?" He asked.

Kela shrugged. "How should I know? Or anyone else for that matter?" She braced her hands on the back of one of her chairs. "We're in unknown territory James. You more than anyone else." She walked into the doorway. "So I'll ask again. You want to sit there and whine your days away? Or do you want to at least try?"

James closed his eyes again. He let out a sigh and kicked his legs in a mock tantrum. "Uuuugh. FINE!" He proclaimed, jumping up onto his feet. "Where is it? Let's go take a look."

"Well that can happen tomorrow." She responded. "Today's almost over. Let's go get your armor. We'll also get your gear back from the mages." James was glad that the King and the Colonel had come to an agreement about that much. "Then once we've got that back here, we'll go see your Sergeant's pyre. After that we can drink, and you can regale us with tales of his life."

"Is that the way funerals are done here?" He asked.

"Well it's not required. But your 'KERNAL' said that he should be given full military burial. Our land's soldiers remember each other with drink and tale telling."

"Okay." James relented. "But I have a feeling that some things in the stories will be lost in translation."

He could use a drink, or ten.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qppd8j/wait_is_this_just_gate_20/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (18/?)

[Previous](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qlzs36/wait_is_this_just_gate_17/) / [First](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/) *Hey I finally figured that out.*

Writer's note: James finally shows a bit of intelligence [waaat?](https://i.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/001/431/201/40f.png) *And performs an ESPIONAGE. He also reveals (to us) his choice. Enjoy.*

\~

King Farrick pressed the green button on the screen before James could stop him.

There was a buzz, with faint static sounding lightly. Then there was a voice. James put it on speakerphone.

"Is this Specialist James Michael Choi? DOD number *\[readers, insert random numbers here\]*? Date of birth eight, nineteen, twenty twenty two?" Asked the voice.

James gave the king one last look before beginning. It was a look that said, 'I hope you're ready for this.'

"Yes this is. But my birthday is the twentieth." He replied.

"Please hold for a moment."

James looked around. Everyone present had a look of confusion.

"What?" He asked.

"What were they saying?" Kela asked.

"They just confirmed my identity. They asked us to hold for a moment." He thought back to the music he'd shown Kela. "Can you guys not understand them?"

"No." The king admitted.

"Huh. Guess the translation runes don't work with the phone." He thought. Then he had an idea.

"당신은 이것을 이해할 수 있습니까?" He asked in the language his grandmother had insisted he learn. Though he had to admit that the extra pay the Army gave him for knowing it had made the lessons worth it.

"What the hell language was that?" Princess Amina asked.

"¿Qué pasa con esto?" He asked in his beloved Spanish this time.

"What?" Kela, this time.

Huh, so the runes only picked up English. I wonder how that happened.

"Nothing. Just a few other languages I speak back home. I was just curious about something." James said.

Before Veliry could begin asking questions the phone began speaking again. It was a different voice this time.

"Mr. Choi. This is Colonel Muhammed. I'm the one who sent you that message on your phone." Said the voice.

"Evening ma'am. It's nice to hear a voice from our world again." He gulped. "I take it I'm a bit of a hot subject over there right now?"

"To say the least. Tell me Mr. Choi. What's your current status? Are you injured? Are you being held captive or forced to perform any duties against your will."

"Well." He said. "To the best of my knowledge I'm currently in another world. And according to the people here; I'm actually in another reality, or universe or something." He paused. "As for how I am? Well I'm not hurt. The whole captive thing is a little hazy. I mean, I can't go back home obviously. But I'm not being held in a prison cell or tortured or anything. I have free movement about the area, within reason. I don't consider myself a prisoner."

There was a slight murmuring, he had a feeling that the Colonel was talking to someone on the other side, likely with a hand over the microphone.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. As for the whole, 'other world' thing. That's pretty much what the scientists here had theorized. Tell me, are these other people in the room with you?"

"I have a feeling that you already know they are Ma'am." *Might as well let em know I'm not stupid.* He thought. "You guys hacked my phone. I'm gonna guess you have the cameras sending you a feed right now. Right?"

The Colonel chuckled. "Very astute Mr. Choi. Yes we can see you. And whoever and WHATEVER those other people around you are. Please pan around for a moment."

James did as he was told. "They want to see what you all look like." He said when he saw everyone's curious faces.

"They can see us?" The king asked in a whisper. James nodded.

"Mr. Choi. We've seen the picture of that... thing... that you have in your phone. And it's standing there with you. Is that a damn werewolf?"

James winced a little. He sighed. ".....Yeah."

"Well than. That's a new one."

"She's the least of what I've seen over here Ma'am." He said.

"Oh?"

"Mind if we get into the specifics some other time? I imagine we both have more interesting questions regarding each other's current situations."

"Fair enough. Tell me Mr. Choi." The Colonel paused. James had a bad sense of foreboding about what was coming. "What happened to Sergeant Odikowe?"

"Um. Ma'am do you have anybody Spanish or Korean fluent in the room?"

He heard some indistinct conversation on the other side. "Yes. Which language would you prefer?"

"Spanish is probably easier." He said.

"Go ahead than."

He looked at Kela, doing what he could not to make it obvious. She had a questioning look on her face, head tilted. But he didn't want there to be a war. And he didn't want to risk the life of someone that he was beginning to like and think of as a friend.

"\[When we were brought here. And I'll let the King and his....magician, go into specifics on that part.\]" He paused, listening as someone translated the spanish for the Colonel. When they were done he continued. "\[The truck was brought in roughly ten feet off the ground. Once it had finished.... transitioning..... to this world it fell pretty hard.\]" He paused again. "\[SGT. Odikowe was not properly braced, most likely due to the surprise of the whole situation. Between that and the shape the truck was in, he ended up being injured very badly.\]" Another translation pause. He looked at Kela one last time. Was he really going to do this? "\[This world doesn't have the technology to heal the injuries he sustained, namely a broken back. As a result he was dying. They put him out of his misery so that he wouldn't suffer.\]"

He had just lied about the death of his friend.

After a moment the Colonel spoke again. "That's most unfortunate. Is there anything else?"

"Yeah." He said. "\[When they examined his body afterwards, they found that he had cancer. They call it the flesh rot here. But he and I had discussed it before. I don't know if he or his family had known about it. But apparently he'd relapsed Ma'am, and apparently pretty badly.\]"

Another translation pause. "I see. I'll have to look and see if that was caught before he came to NTC." She said.

"How's Corporal Batista Ma'am?" He asked. He wanted to know how his friend was doing. On top of that he wanted to move away from the subject of the lie he'd just told. "\[By the way. I'm only speaking Spanish because they can't understand it over here. They understand English when I speak it. But not when it comes through the phone.\]"

"Message received. Corporal Batista is doing well. It was a close call with the blood loss. And he's not doing himself any favors going on about alien abductions. But, with a decent prosthetic, he's expected to make a full recovery."

"That's good." James internally sighed with relief. "I'm glad he's alright. Guess his nickname will be more accurate if he keeps talkin' about little green men. Think you could let me talk to him some time?"

"We'll.... Consider it." She said. "As I'm sure you understand, we can't exactly let word of what's happening get out. You should have seen all the little lab-coats over here when you just said that you were in another world."

"Speaking of that." He said. "How did you guys send this little camera thing over here? And how do I have such good phone signal? The..... mages.... over here say that opening 'the god's door' as they call it is an incredibly difficult thing." Well there it was, he'd actually openly said the word 'mages' to them.

"Mages huh?" The Colonel mused. "Well the 'Powers that be' have pulled all the strings. We've got science experiments as old as the 60's being tried out. Some of this stuff looks like it comes straight from an old Frankenstein movie or something. We basically just threw spaghetti at the wall and saw what would stick. We're refining the process even now." She said. "The first time we got a connection it lasted all of two seconds and we basically caused L.A. County to have a blackout. And that was for an opening that couldn't fit a mosquito." She admitted. "But we're getting better at it."

"\[Well you should know. The people here say that the door is a one way trip. If you get to the point where you're thinking of sending PEOPLE over, just remember that. Any attempt to 'hop back through' will almost definitely be fatal.\]" He warned.

Another translation pause. "Understood." The colonel went quiet for a second, James could hear some conversation. "Mr. Choi. I do believe the pleasantries are at an end now. You mentioned a King and some... Mages.. being nearby. I believe it's time we had a conversation with them. And I'll need you to translate I suppose."

"Understood Ma'am." He turned back to King Farrick. "Time for the whole 'government relations' thing your highness."

The King nodded. James had a feeling that he was about to be in for a very long conversation.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qnkaf4/wait_is_this_just_gate_19/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (17/?)

"Kela, Amina, Vel, you three stay here. Mister Choi I don't know how to use that device, and it's your government calling, so I figure you'll probably want to stay too." The King said. He wasn't speaking loudly, but he didn't have to. Nobody else in the room was making so much as a noise. Other than James's phone going off, the king had the floor. Then he continued in a tone that allowed no discussion. "Everyone. Else. OUT!"

There were no questions. No murmur. And absolutely no hesitation. As soon as the King had finished speaking everyone not mentioned immediately began moving, and not slowly, towards the door and filing out. It took about a minute, but once the room had cleared and the last guard had closed the door with a nod, the king turned to James.

"James, is there anything I need to be aware of before this begins?" He asked.

"Well, they're not going to be any happier about any of this than I am." James admitted. "They'll be mad about the destruction of the STRYKER. They'll be mad about Batista losing his leg. They'll be really mad about the unlawful abduction of citizens, especially members of the Military." He paused and looked at Kela. "And they'll be downright bloodthirsty at the killing of one of their soldiers."

"I can't say I'd blame them." The king said somberly. "If another nation had done the same to us it would be tantamount to declaring war."

"They'll likely consider this the same."

"What should I say?" The King asked.

"That's not really for me to say." James replied. "I still don't even know WHY you summoned me. You haven't told me what grave danger this world is in that caused you to do the summoning." James thought for a second.

The phone was still ringing in his hand, normally it would have gone to voicemail minutes ago. But then again they'd removed his decline call button, who knew what else they were capable of. The king spoke for a moment.

"Kela. I know it's not fair. You were only doing what your instincts and upbringing taught you was right under the circumstances. And I know that you have a new pack leader that you need to listen to. But you need to know that if it means salvaging relations with a foreign power." He gestured to the melted scrap on the floor. "Especially one powerful enough to reopen the door. Then we might have to offer you up so that they may try you." He turned to James. "They would put her on trial right? They wouldn't just kill her outright?"

James considered it. Would they? She'd killed a member of the Army. And there was an eye witness who was also a member of the Army. Plus she was a werewolf. "I..... I don't know." He admitted. "If they did. I don't imagine the trial would go in her favor. Plus Kela's a werewolf. Something that isn't even considered real in our world. They might want to dissect her. Hell, they'd probably run her through a scientific shredding machine to figure out how she works. Who knows if they'd even give her a chance to speak."

Kela looked legitimately worried, the princess looked at her with concern.

"I hadn't considered that." The king admitted, speaking more to himself than anyone else.

"Look." James continued. "Be honest with them. Tell them WHY you summoned me. Explain how the summoning works, even if it's only a basic description. Emphasize the fact that you don't actually get a choice of who get's chosen." He paused. "The fact that there's a multiverse is likely already making waves, scientifically. The fact that there are also ACTUAL GODS residing in that multiverse?" He shook his head a bit. "Who knows what kind of chaos that'll cause if it gets out."

"I'm sure it would cause quite a bit of trouble. What will they do about you being here?" The king asked.

"Odds are they're only doing this to try to rescue me. The Army- hell, the government in general- doesn't like having people taken." He paused. "They'll take me by force if they think that's what it takes."

"What would that entail?" Kela asked this, ever the captain of the guard.

"I don't know. I don't know how they're reopening the door. Probably seals, maybe drones. Hell, they might just lasso me and pull me back through." He said, only half joking about the last part.

"Seals?" Kela asked.

"Long story, just a name really." James replied.

"The lasso would be a bad idea." Veliry said, speaking for the first time since the King's dismissal of the crowd. "That'd be a very bad idea."

"Why?" The King asked.

"Well, because the door is one way." She continued after seeing the confused looks on everyone's faces. "People, and other summoned things, have tried to reenter the door before." She thought for a second. "Actually, it's pretty common according to the records."

"Well, what happens?" James asked. He wanted to know more than anyone.

"Nothing good." The small mage said. "If they're lucky they just bounce off and get burned a little bit. But that's usually only if the door is already mostly closed when they try. If it's still wide enough for them to fit. Well..."

"Well what?" The princess this time.

"Well...." Veliry gulped. "They go through...." She grimaced a bit. "And then they pop back out on the reverse side of the same door. And according to the records, it's pretty gruesome. They don't live. They've never survived it."

Now it was James's turn to gulp. "Well.... Let's hope they don't try the lasso method then."

"That's just based on what we know though." She said meekly. "We don't know how they're opening it. It could be different." But it was obvious that she didn't believe that.

"Right." James said. *Great, so unless there's a "return to sender" spell, I'm probably here for the long haul.*

"James. Are you ready?" The king asked him, hand on his shoulder.

"I've literally never been ready to talk to any brass." James said sarcastically. "But yeah sure." He was about to hit the button when he remembered one last piece of advice. "Just be aware." He thought of a quote from one of his old sci-fi movies. "They'll come at you sideways. It's how they think, how they move. They'll smile until they're up close. And that's when they'll hit you." He paraphrased. "If they manage to send someone through, they'll act nice. But there'll be a killer under the smile." He ad-libbed that part. "Just be aware of that."

The King looked at him, and it seemed like he was really considering James for the first time. He smirked a little bit.

"So they're just like any other government than?" He asked. Then he reached out and tapped the green button before James could react.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qmqhx2/wait_is_this_just_gate_18/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (16/?)

James awoke refreshed and feeling better than he had in a long time.

What had he dreamed of? He could have sworn it involved snowboarding. Or at least it had involved snow. It was hard to tell, the dream had faded the way all dreams did upon waking.

For the first time since coming here, he hadn't woke up hoping for his cot at NTC or a bed back at the barracks. He woke up knowing where he was and why. Well, maybe not why, but he at least knew his situation.

He stood up and stretched, yawning the weariness away just a little bit, and smelled the remnants of the incense. It had started off smelling of apple pie and hot cocoa, but now it smelled like fresh cooked bacon and coffee. Odd, but pleasant, and still relaxing.

It was as he was putting his boots back on that he heard some kind of commotion outside the front door. He finished tying his boots and threw his jacket back on. That was when he heard a long horn outside his window. When he looked out he saw guards all over the castle ground scrambling to their positions. He scrambled to finish dressing.

"Kela?! What's going on?" He yelled. But there was no answer from the other side of the door. He knocked on it. "Kela, you in there?" After a moment of silence he began turning the handle. "I'm coming in."

The room was empty save for the as of yet undisturbed shopping bags that had been sent up. He looked out onto the small balcony to see if she was there, but that was empty too. He checked the armor room/foyer, and then the walk in closet though it was locked.

Not knowing what To do James tried to think like Kela for a moment. If he was the captain of the royal guard where would he keep a spare weapon. Once he'd thought of it like that it became somewhat obvious. She probably kept one where he kept his knife whenever he was in the barracks.

He quickly checked the nightstands top drawers to no avail. He made a point to only scan, he wasn't trying to snoop after all, he just needed something to arm himself with. But both nightstands were empty. He was about to check under her pillows, but when he braced his hand against the headboard he heard a light rattle. Sure enough, hanging from a pair of hooks on the back was a small short sword.

He went back into his room and put the chest and back plate that he'd gotten on. He skipped the leather jacket and simply slipped the armor over his uniform jacket, it fit better than he'd expected. Then he hooked the short sword to the left side of his belt, pinned the badge the king had given him to his collar, and began walking out.

Just as he neared the door he heard a knocking sound. He froze. Who were they here for? Were they looking for Kela? Or were they looking for him?

Was the other foot finally dropping and this was when they revealed their evil plan to kill him? Even if they weren't after him, would the armor and sword get him in trouble?

He didn't know. But what he did know was that whatever was on the other side of the door, he wasn't going to meet it unarmed. Then the knocker at the door spoke.

"Mister Hero. Sir?" an unsure voice said on the other side of the door.

"Uuuuh. Yeah?" James replied, he was somewhat off balance from the timidity of the knocker.

"There's been a development sir. Captain Swiftrunner has requested that we escort you to the summoning room." There was a pause and James could hear some kind of argument on the other side. "She said that your people might be trying to come through."

What?! How? Was all James could think. "Um, okay I'm coming out."

He opened the door to find two of the castle servants. One of them was carrying a wooden tray that had a cloth bundle in it. The other was nervously facing him, shocked at his armed status. He was guessing that that was the one that had spoken.

"What's going on?"

"We don't know sir." The nervous one said. "The captain instructed me to come retrieve you. Belvin here," He gestured at the servant carrying the tray. "was instructed to retrieve something from the mages and bring it to you."

James looked at Belvin. "What did you bring?"

"I don't really know sir. But the mage insisted that I keep it safe, and said to tell you that it had been charged by your sun gatherer." And then he unwrapped what James had been wanting to get back for days now.

James looked at the cellphone for a moment. He saw the text from the Colonel, but he'd have to take a better look at it later. "Thanks. Let's get going."

The two servants led him downstairs and through the halls to the summoning room, though he didn't know why the Belvin came along. There James was met with the sight of a small crowd of onlookers and more than a few of the castle guards.

"Make way!" Belvin shouted. "We brought the Hero!" James was a little embarrassed to hear that being yelled. But, sure enough, the crowd parted.

Inside the room Kela, Princess Amina, several more guards, and two rather frazzled people that looked like mad scientists were conversing near the summoning circle. Kela was waving him over, and the princess looked at

him with scorn. The two mad scientist looking people actually looked excited.

"James, over he-" Kela tried to say, before one of the 'scientists' barged past her and took James's hand, shaking it wildly.

"So you're the hero? I haven't seen you since the summoning. I'm Veliry of Archostia. I'm one of the ones that summoned you. Tell me have you-" Now it was the diminutive, bespectacled redhead's turn to be interrupted as Kela placed a hand on her head and lifted her off her feet. She'd been speaking almost as fast as Mela had when James had met her the night before. He was thankful for the interruption.

"Vel. Now's not the time." Said the rather irritated werewolf. "Let's tell him whats happening before your vocal chords catch fire." She said this while also rotating and placing the small woman back on her feet behind her. Then she turned back to James and looked him up and down. "You put on your armor, and is that my sword?" She sounded mad, but she looked almost like she was impressed.

"Uh, yeah, I didn't know what was going on. What is going on?"

"Well, it's hard to say. I was lead here by a terrible smell. And upon further investigation we found something unnatural here in the summoning room." She said as she walked him over to where it was. The other guard, and the two scientists parted for them. The princess was kneeling down in front of the item of interest. "I put it back down where it was found. I picked it up, but then realized that I had no idea if it was dangerous or not."

James took a knee and inspected it. After a few seconds he thought he knew what he was looking at.

"I think it's a camera of some kind." He lifted up the slagged piece of plastic and microchips and looked at it a bit better. "It should be safe. But yeah, this is definitely a bunch of cameras, and look" He pointed at something. "That's it's battery, or what's left of it anyways."

He stood up and fished his phone out of his pocket. *Holy shit, it's up to four bars now.* He thought. "Remember when I showed you that picture of yourself on this?" Kela nodded. "I did that using a camera." He flipped it over and showed them the lenses on the back. He pointed at the similar lenses on the pile of molten plastic on the floor. "That's what those are. I'm willing to bet that this was sent through from my side."

Off to the side the two 'scientists' were muttering something to each other. Kela was about to interrupt when there was a commotion back at the door to the room. Suddenly one of the guards made an announcement.

"HIS MAJESTY!!! KING FARRICK!!!" The guard yelled.

"Oh, knock it off Tellene. They know who I am dammit." The King rebuked the guard. The guard said something that James couldn't hear. "No, you're not in trouble. You were doing your damn job. But let's save all the pomp

for later." Then the king made it to the group near the circle. "What's going on Kela? Why all this," he gestured at the crowd and the guards lining the room. "why all this commotion? What's so urgent?"

"Your highness. I have reason to believe that something came through the god's door." She gestured to the melted blob. "And Specialist Choi believes that it may be a 'camera' device from his world."

The King had a look on his face of shock. He looked at James. "Are you sure that's what it is?"

"I mean, it's melted. So I COULD be wrong. But that's what it looks like." James admitted.

The king looked at the two 'scientists'. "Veliry, Marcos, you're our lead mages." The two of them stopped muttering and stood up straighter. Marcos was taller than James had thought. He was also very old. "Is this possible?"

"Well sir." Marcos began. "In all the records of summonings it has never occurred before." He thought for a second. "There have been a few occasions where the door was held open longer than normal. Like when Aggralax the blighted poured through in all it's immeasurable bulk. Or when the arch-warlock Beggorah-"

"YES!" Veliry interrupted. Much to Marcos's irritation. James was actually glad she had. The old mage spoke very slowly. "Yes it is possible." She continued.

"How?" Kela asked.

"Well, it's been a theory for a long time, centuries really. But other mages in the past have theorized that when the door opens it leaves a small tear. Like a cut in your hand." She drew her finger across her hand for emphasis. "Just like that cut, the tear eventually heals. And since it's a small cut- you know in terms of the size of our universe anyways- it heals pretty much perfectly." She was beginning to talk faster, clearly excited. "Now, typically that's all that happens. But like Marcos was saying in the past certain summoned entities have been able to HOLD the tear open. High mage Elsandrel Tar'vandus theorized that if a summoning ever occurred involving a world that was adv-

"That's just the theory of a drunk elvish fool!" Marcos interrupted. "Elsandrel was just ashamed that he was the one that had led the summoning of Beggorah. He spent the rest of his career looking for excuses."

"That doesn't change the fact that it's a valid theory." Vel responded.

James recognized a nerd fight when he saw one. Hell, him and his battle buddies had had plenty of them. And on plenty of different, often times stupid, subjects. While Kela tried to cut the two mages off, he decided that checking out the message on his phone was more important.

Colonel Muhammed huh? Never heard of em. At least my mom got my message. Hope Batty is ok. He thought. *Well I guess I better respond*.

And then as if reading his mind the phone began to vibrate in his hand, loud klaxons sounding from the small speaker. On the screen it simply read, **UNKNOWN NUMBER.** There was no decline button to hit like there normally would be, only the green accept call button.

"Uuuuuh, King Farrick?" He called out. But the King was currently trying to get the two mages to give him a straight answer. Kela was holding the two of them up off their feet, one in each hand, as they struggled to reach each other. "King Farrick!" He said, louder this time.

Oddly it was Princess Amina who got the King's attention for him.

"EVERYONE HOLD YOUR TONGUES!!!"

She shouted this in a voice that seemed unnaturally loud. James's ears rang just a little bit. But the room grew quiet. James hadn't even realized how loud it had gotten. Then the princess continued at a normal volume.

"Father the *HERO."* She said the word hero with as much venom as she could. "Is trying to tell you something."

The king looked at him. "Well what is it Mr. Choi?"

James held the phone up. "You said you wanted to help make amends with my government. Well they want to talk." He pointed at the green button on the screen. "And they're not taking NO for an option."

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qlzs36/wait_is_this_just_gate_17/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (15/?)

Writer's note: it's wolf POV time.

\~

Kela worried for James.

She had noticed his state almost as soon as he'd turned back after seeing the funeral pyres that had been constructed.

It was the state of a soldier that had just gotten through a long, drawn out, brutally difficult battle. That look of sudden realization of what has just happened after the adrenaline has finally worn off. It was a look of weariness, pain, confusion, sadness, and yet also a soldier's prerogative to simply continue moving forward to the next job.

She had hoped, at that time, that he would snap out of it once the pyres were out of sight. But it had persisted throughout the day. He trudged,

eyes half lidded and head down, through the halls. He'd quickly bathed and dressed in his extra uniform. He'd quietly acknowledged the King's messages and then just as quietly traveled with her to the King's meeting chamber.

She had a sense that he wasn't really there. Even when he spoke directly too her it seemed as though he was somewhere else, focused on something out of sight. Her nose spoke of a sickness, it's wolf enhanced senses sniffing out something that it couldn't place, but knew wasn't right. She'd tested his forehead, he'd barely noticed, and found no fever.

It was their conversation in the mess hall that had truly convinced her. She'd sent for a priestess before they'd even left the room. And Moranna of Kai was waiting for them outside her quarters when they'd gotten there. She'd watched James remove his boots and jacket and flop down onto his bed, lying on his back and staring at the ceiling. He didn't even notice the Guratsian Priestess.

The priestess did what Kela had seen her, and other priestesses, do for countless war worn soldiers. The twin incense sticks, magically capable of bringing forth a person's most cherished memories, while also inducing sleep. They had another effect though, one designed to protect the person they were being used for. While James was smelling something lovely and comforting, Kela was smelling burning hair and rotten flesh. Her wolf nose reeled at the stench.

Moranna told her about James's condition and it wasn't good.

His soul was torn. Torn between two goals. One half was focused on staying, helping, adventuring, and doing what it thought of as right. The other half was confused, scared, and angry and wanted nothing more than vengeance and a way home, and doing what it also thought was right.

Moranna had worse news though. This was only happening because James had yet to fully accept the reality of the situation. What made this bad was that it was bound only to worsen as more and more information proved just how real it was for him. Only time would tell which side of James would win out.

He would either accept things and become stronger for it.

Or he would continue to reject it, and he would likely break inside.

Even worse; there was nothing either of them could do anything about it. It was, ultimately, up to James.

After that Moranna informed her that James would sleep for at least two hours, that was how long the incense would burn for. Until they burned out he would slumber, and dream of his most precious times.

She struggled to think of what would happen if James did break. Before him she'd only ever known Amina as her pack leader. She'd always assumed that if Amina had been taken away from the position that it would occur by death in battle, and that she would be following close behind. James

gaining the position had been unexpected. She didn't know what to think of the possibility of him losing his mind. She didn't know how she would handle that.

So she left. After all, she might as well get some work done. She'd been off patrol schedule since James had shot her. Plus both James's armor and her repaired armor should be available for pick up. Additionally she wanted to finally speak to Amina. She hadn't had the chance since the princess had punched James. Besides, it stank in here now.

As she walked she thought of what she knew of James.

James was young. She had a feeling that his age wasn't accurate, maybe because his world had a different length of years than hers. Either way he was younger than her by at least five or six years by her guess.

He was also a soldier, not in the sense that she was used to though. His arms and armor were strange, his uniform even more so. He had admitted to knowing next to nothing of swordplay, but also claimed to have an extensive knowledge of hand to hand combat. She had thought, from looking at him, that he would be weak. Yet she had seen him run longer than she'd ever seen a human run before, and he had admitted to running even farther in his past. For fun no less.

He was oddly casual in almost every situation she'd seen him in. Yet he had also tried to kill her, without any hesitation, the moment he had learned of how she'd killed his Sergeant. Naked no less, implying a greater, stronger, warrior's soul than she'd seen in almost anyone. He'd also refused to give anything more than the most basic of information about his military or his world. Things that would be easy for anyone to figure out given time, but nothing that could give an edge if they ever clashed. This implied a sense of mindfulness and discipline in regards to his status as a soldier in a foreign land. He was working with them, but wouldn't knowingly betray his people.

She also thought of last night. How James had taken to her two children and her mate. He'd literally been blindsided by the former. Yet he'd reacted quite well. He'd foolishly tried to play a game of tag with the children and learned the hard way just how fast wolves (even pups) could move. He had also had a talking to from Jurl, much to her chagrin. Yet in spite of these things, James had been incredibly friendly to all of them. Odd considering that SHE had killed his friend.

She'd only known James for a short while, days really, and yet in spite of that she felt a deep respect for him. And not just because he was, by right, her pack leader.

Anyone else in his position would likely have given up, or gotten themselves killed, the moment they realized what was going on. But not James. He had instead stood tall and adapted remarkably well so far.

And if the funeral of his friend was what finally ended up forcing him to feel despair. Well, that seemed a respectable thing, a respectable limit to what he was capable of handling. At least she thought it was.

It was as she thought this that her nose told her of something gone awry.

She took a long deep sniff of the air, and smelled something foul. Not the incense, either. It was something wholly unknown to her, something unnatural even. Additionally it was accompanied by a smell that was known to her, the smell of ozone sickened by the unnatural.

The smell of magic.

She looked around and realized where she was. Though she knew not why she was there. In her wandering, and wondering, she had ended up only a hall or so away from the summoning room.

Please, don't be coming from that room. She thought.

But the hair on the back of her neck raised, and her ears flattened to her skull, her tail pointed straight to the ground. Without even realizing it, she began prowling forward, following her nose the whole way.

It lead her to where she'd hoped it wouldn't.

The two guards posted at the doorway stood up straighter once she rounded the corner. Vekal, a human, and Moerez, a hooded Szerian.

No wonder they haven't smelled it. Damn snakes have worse noses than humans do. She thought.

"Have neither of you smelled that?" She asked.

"Ma'am?" Vekal asked.

"You don't smell that odd smell? It's like something burning." She sniffed deeply again. "But I can't tell what. Have any noises come from the God's door?"

"I ssssmelled something earlier, but that was sssssome time ago." Moerez replied. "Figured it wasssss just sssssssome weird foreign food from the kitchen or the larder."

"No noises though?"

"No ma'am." Vekal again.

"Hmmm. Open it up. I wish to look for myself. My nose says it comes from in there."

"Yes ma'am." Vekal said, moving toward the door's oversized handle. "Wolf's noses are way better than ours." Moerez moved to grab the other handle.

"Weapons drawn once it's open." Kela ordered. She pulled her sword from it's sheath, and a dagger from her belt. The two guards followed suit.

The moment the door opened the hair on her neck strained to raise even further. Her clawed hands instinctively gripped her weapons even harder and her lips curled back revealing the rows of sharp teeth underneath. The smell of burned.... something was intense.

She creeped forward slowly. Vekal stayed at the door, his human eyes not capable of piercing the dark the way hers and Moerenz's were. Plus one guard was always supposed to remain at the door, and bolt it shut in case something needed to be kept within.

She followed her nose until she was almost on top of the summoning circle. Nothing moved, there were no noises. Then her foot caught on something, the claw of her middle toe brushing against it. She sheathed her dagger and pulled a small orb from a pouch on her belt. With a whisper it lit up faintly, but it was enough to see what she had stepped on.

It was a small puddle of some kind of black material that looked to have melted. With a bit of prying it popped up off the stone of the floor and she held it in her hand. There were little glass lenses here and there. They looked like the kind on the mages star scopes, only much smaller. There were also bits of wire protruding here and there, and little bits of bright green....something, with bits of metal melded into them.

It was the source of the smell. Whatever it was it smelled of the burnt something that had drawn her here, and the ozone reek of magic.

"Moerenz?"

"Yesssss captain?" the snake man asked.

"Alert the castle guard, and send for the mages." She paused. "I believe that someone is trying to reopen the god's door." She thought for a second, trying to remember what the king had said was sent to James's phone. "And I think I might know who."

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qld0zd/wait_is_this_just_gate_16/)

Wait, is this just GATE?

THIS IS PART (14/?) Totally forgot to put that in the title.

First:
https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/py52wo/wait_is_this_just_gate_1/

Previous:
https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qijhh6/wait_is_this_just_gate_13/

Waffle has the rest. Enjoy

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James was numb.

He didn't remember going back up to Kela's quarters, or to the bathes to refresh before he changed. He didn't remember making the decision to wear his spare uniform instead of any of the nice clothes that they'd had sent to the room.

He didn't remember the knock on the door, or the messenger informing them that his message had gotten a response on his phone. The King wished to speak about it with him.

Everything felt overwhelming, too vivid, and yet too fuzzy around the edges. Every breath felt like it was heavy, and his arms and legs felt like they were moving through molasses. He had a headache and the distinct feeling that he might fall over vomiting at any moment. He could feel his heart beating in his ears, it's rhythm far too rapid to be healthy.

James was doing everything in his power to continue functioning. To hold himself up and maintain some semblance of a soldier's bearing. But he was failing.

He knew, even though it had never happened before, that he was having a panic attack.

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He didn't remember getting to the King's personal office. Or sitting in the chair in front of the King's desk. Everything between getting dressed and now had been some kind of inconsequential blur. Like blacking out after drinking and only remembering fragments of what had happened the night before.

The king was speaking to him, and Kela too though he hadn't remembered her being here until she spoke.

She has to have been with me the whole time though, right? He thought. *I mean, I'd've never found this place otherwise, and she's basically my shadow/warden/bodyguard. Wait, did I walk here?*

The king was talking about a message on his phone. Apparently "The mages" had managed to figure out English and it's alphabet well enough to translate. He thought that was a good thing. But apparently the message was not.

The King wanted him to respond to the message however he saw fit. That was good. He was also getting his phone back. Even better. The king said that they would get it back after the >!funeral pyre.!<

After the what? Why did that word just fuzz out right now?

"I'm sorry your highness. My brain is a little distracted right now." He admitted. "Could you repeat that?"

"Yes I imagine you're dealing with a lot right now." The King replied, a hint of sadness in his voice. "I said we can get you your phone back after the >!funeral pyre.!< I'd like to help you with a response. That way I can try to amend relations with your government."

"Oh, right. Of course." He said. "Yeah, that sounds good." *It did it again. What did he say? Why couldn't I hear it?*

\---

Just like the trip there, the trip back out was just a blur. The king had asked if SGT Odikowe, or CPL Batista had any ceremonies that needed to be observed. James was pretty sure that he'd simply asked if he could light some candles at whatever passed for a church around here. Or had he? He wasn't sure right now.

"James are you alright?" Who had said that? He looked and saw that it was Kela. Of course it was, she went everywhere he did. But where were they now?

He looked around. They were sitting in a room full of tables, and chairs, and food, and drinks. *Oh, we must be in the mess hall. She'd said something about it before. Wonder what's for lunch.*

"James?"

He looked back. "Huh?" he asked.

"Are you alright? You haven't even touched your food. You've just been staring at it for the past few minutes."

He looked down. Sure enough there was a large metal plate loaded with food. What looked like fried chicken, potato wedges, some smeplies and salt, some kind of steamed vegetables, and some rolls. It smells good enough. But when had he gotten that?

"I uh.... I don't know." He admitted. "I think I just have too much on my plate right now."

"Really? It's not that much food."

"Hmm? Oh, not the food. Although yeah, maybe that too. I don't feel very hungry right now." He said while putting his fork down.

"But, you're the one who asked about getting lunch."

"Did I?" He wondered.

"Yes." She looked at him curiously. "James do you need to lie down?"

"Don't we have to go to the..." He trailed off. What did they need to go to again? "The... thing... we have to go to the thing. In the courtyard."

"Yes the >!funeral.!< But that is not until sun down. If you'd like, we can rest for a while. I can have a priestess come and ease you into a slumber. I'll wake you before then."

There it is again. That non-word. "Sure. I guess that would be fine."

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Another blurry, foggy, trip, and suddenly he's laying back in the bed in Kela's visitor's room. He's in just his t-shirt and pants now, and a lady with light blue skin and black hair is in the room with him. She's wearing some kind of red and gold robes that kind of remind him of Star Wars for some reason.

"What's going on?" He asks.

"I'm just lighting some incense. It will help ease your mind." She turns and he sees that she has some kind of tattoo on her forehead, a starburst with wings. "Your mind. It's unlike any that I've ever seen before. Especially in humans. So many emotions, so many thoughts. All jumbled. Like a ball of wire that's been tangled, or a volcano on the verge of eruption."

"You can read my mind?" He asks while sitting up. That might be an issue.

"Read?" She chuckles a little. "No, but I can sense it's motions. Can sense your emotions and how they intermingle."

"You're an empath? That's that's the word right?"

"Yes." She places her hand on his shoulder and eases him back down. She's gentle about it, and he feels obliged to let himself be pushed for some reason. "That is what I am. And your mind is a maelstrom right now. Though ,considering your situation I can't say I blame it for being as such."

She turns and finishes lighting the incense. It let's out a smell like apple pie. Another stick is lit, this one smells like hot cocoa. He feels himself remembering something, a trip somewhere. Somewhere that he remembers feels physically cold, and yet is so incredibly warm in his mind.

She walks out of the room and James sees Kela through the door. She looks worried. The two of them begin speaking as the strange blue lady closes the door. But James doesn't hear any of it. He's asleep before the door even latches shut, and for the first time since he's gotten here, it's a good sleep.

----------something something page break or whatever----------

Back in the summoning room, that same orange sparking circle opens again.

It's slightly bigger this time, maybe the size of a baseball. Though it flickers more rapidly.

Once again it only lasts a few seconds.

But this time, something comes through.

It's small, maybe the size of a ping pong ball. It looks black. But if someone from our world were to look at it they would recognize the faint translucence and likely know what it is.

It emits several bright flashes before it's battery dies. After a second of idleness it pops and smokes, destroying itself.

But it's done its job.

And our world gets its first images of a different plane of existence.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qkof2k/wait_is_this_just_gate_15/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (13/?)

In the small attic room of Kela and Jurl's home, James tosses and turns.

"*SARGE DON'T DO THIS!!!"..... James remembers saying that.*

^(James hears screams of pain.)

"*Man! Why was I even brought here?"..... That's his voice. He doesn't remember saying this, but he's thought it.*

"SPECIALIST JAMES CHOI, STAND AT ATTENTION!!!"..... He wonders who said that? It doesn't sound like any of his old NCO's or commanders.

^(He feels heat, burning, like being on the surface of the sun.)

"Do you remember the first command you ever gave me?"..... "Kela? What's happening?" He asks, but there's no response.

^(There's loud clanging, like sheet metal and wood being hammered. There are yells of anger.)

"Please do this for me."..... "DO WHAT?" He asks. "What do you need me to do?"

^(James hears more screams, pain and anger mixing. He feels the heat again. A chorus of wolves lets out a long, deep, howl that fills him with dread and anguish.)

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And then he wakes up. He flops out of the bed, reaching for a pistol and a vest that aren't there, covered in sweat.

It's still night time when he looks out the small attic window, though the sun looks to be creeping up on the horizon. He walks down to the small bathroom on the second floor and washes his face with a damp towel.

What had he dreamed? It hadn't been a coherent dream. Not the acted out movie that dreams normally were. Not the relived memories that sometimes haunted a person. No, it was more like a random set of sound bites and highlights.

And then the dreams do what all dreams do, and seem to fade around the edges. He tries to hold on to them. But after a minute of mentally grasping at the mist that they become, he gives up.

They're just dreams. He reassures himself. *Just my brain freaking out about everything. They don't mean anything.* But this feels like a lie for some reason.

Regardless, there's nothing he can do about them. He goes back upstairs and puts his pants and t-shirt back on. He figures he's up early enough. He might as well try to do some soldier stuff.

He creeps downstairs as quietly as he can. From the room that he'd helped Jurl carry the kids to he hears an adorable little snore, sawing away at tiny little dream trees every few seconds. From Jurl and Kela's room he hears a low rumbling, likely Jurl's breathing.

Still asleep. Thank god. He thinks. But he hasn't noticed the lack of another sound that he should be hearing.

As he reaches the bottom of the stairs to the first floor he's startled by a familiar voice.

"Running away?" James jumps at the sound of Kela's voice.

"Oh Jesus Christ you startled me." James says, hand on his chest. "Why are you awake?"

"I heard you. I'm guessing you were having nightmares. Plus I could smell you, you were sweating like you'd just spent all day in the training yards." She replied. She was leaning against the doorway to the kitchen, a large cup of tea in her hands. "Are you ok?"

James thought for a minute. Was he? "I uh... I don't know. Probably not." He kneels down and begins putting on and lacing his boots. "I just. I

think I need to go for a run. Do some exercise. Feel like a soldier for a bit."

"Anything you wanna talk about?"

James sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "I don't... I don't know man. Not really. Not with you anyways." He looked up, Kela had a slightly hurt look on her face. "Just. I think I just need a few minutes to myself ok?"

"I understand." He had to wonder if she did. But that was her problem.

He finished lacing his boots and walked out the door. There was a chill in the air, the dew on the grass had frosted over. But the air smelled good and clean. He took a deep breath and began jogging, singing old army cadences in his head. He needed to sing them to keep his mind occupied, and as empty as he could get it.

It helped, but only barely.

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James finished his exercises a little after the sun had finished coming up. He'd stayed on the two(ish) acres of land, running around the inside of the stone wall. When he was done he went back inside, drank some (startlingly fresh) water from the kitchen tap, rinsed off a bit, and put the rest of his uniform on.

Kela, wisely, left him alone.

The five of them, once Mela had been shaken awake by her brother, walked into town and grabbed breakfast and morning tea from one of the cafes. Nothing fancy, just bacon, eggs, something that tasted like an orange but looked like a blue kiwi, and some rolls. They chit chatted and James joked with the kids. He jokingly scratched Mela at the base of her ear and was delighted when she scrunched up her face and began rapidly stomping her foot on the ground. Much to Mela's frustration. But it got a laugh from everyone else at the table.

Afterwards they said their farewells, Kela promising to see them on her next break days. James finally got Tilo to shake his hand, though the were-pup immediately ran back behind his father's legs after. And then the two of them began the walk back to the castle.

"How was your run?"

"Good. I guess." James replied absent mindedly.

"You ran for a very long time. I don't think I've ever known a human who could run at that pace for nearly an hour." She said.

"Yeah, I used to run marathons every now and then. Plus the Army loves running."

"Interesting. What is a marathon?" She asked.

"Honestly, just a shit load of running. I think it got it's start back in our ancient history or something. But either way, it's a race to see who can run twenty six miles and some change the fastest."

"The people of your world can run twenty six miles at a time? And do it as a race no less?" She asked incredulously.

"Well, not all of em. But some of em can. I can, or at least could. I haven't done one in a few years now." he admitted.

"Very impressive, perhaps I should begin having my soldiers do distance running."

"Not a bad idea. But also not terribly practical if they're wearing armor." He said.

"Oh?"

"The distance running helps with endurance. Which, you know, is great overall." He said. "But running in armor is usually short fast sprints. A hundred yards or so tops."

"Hmmm, I suppose that makes sense."

They walked on a little longer. James watched as the town slowly came to life. Shops and restaurants opened their windows and doors. Horses and other beasts of burden (some of which he did not recognize) began carrying people, or pulling wagons and carts down the streets. They passed a few guard patrols, they saluted Kela and Kela saluted back.

"So." James finally spoke again as they neared the Castle gate. "What's today's plan?"

"Don't you remember?"

"I mean, Kraug said my armor would be ready today." He responded.

"True, it should be."

"So I imagine we start seeing how I handle a sword or axe or something." He posited.

"We could, if that's your desire." She admitted.

"Or maybe the King'll let me get my stuff back." He thought out loud. He kind of wanted to know if his message had gone through. "Or maybe the mages will start teaching me magic. You know, if I even can learn it."

"Maybe." Kela paused. "But. I doubt any of that will happen today."

"Why not?" James asked, looking back at her.

Kela pointed beyond him, into the Castle's main courtyard. "Because, we have more important things to do."

James turned back and looked at where she had been pointing.

In the courtyard were two sets of scaffolding, one larger than the other, made of wood. Piled around them was more lumber and bundles of twigs and sticks, some scattered hay, and a few jugs of what he assumed was oil of some kind.

"Oh, right." He said. He'd forgotten about that, or maybe he'd unknowingly tried NOT to think about it. "that."

It was going to be a long day.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qkiyu7/wait_is_this_just_gate/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (12/?)

Writer's note: Jurl sounds like Christoph Waltz. I HAVE SPOKEN!!!

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After several minutes of, rather intense, wrestling Kela finally stood up with the two pups. Mel was firmly latched to her left bicep, chewing away, and the other pup was wrapped around her waist and right leg. As she stood the large werewolf that had been standing in the door began walking up.

"Alright alright." Kela said while prying Mel off of her arm, and chuckling to herself. "Let go. We have a visitor. Introduce yourselves you little muttlings."

The two wolf pups detached from their mother and landed on their feet. Mel ran up in front of James, tail wagging. "Hi! I'm Mela are you my mom's new packmate? Auntie Amina is super mad at you! She's really mad that you shot mommy!" The little wolf said in that speed that only ultra hyper little girls seem capable of.

"Uh, hi Mela." James crouched a little and reached his hand out. "I'm James. It's very nice to meet you." The little wolf grabbed his hand with both of hers and shook as hard as she could.

The other pup was hiding behind his mother's legs, peaking out at James shyly.

"Come on now Tilo. Be a good wolf and introduce yourself." The approaching wolf said as he walked up to Kela. He embraced her in a hug and the two of them rubbed snouts for a moment. Then he turned to James. "Hello. I'm Jurl. Kela's Mate." He said as he reached his arm out in

greeting. "This little belly shower." He peered around at Tilo. "Is Tilo. He's a little shy."

"Well Tilo." Said James, slowly standing back up. "That's ok. I don't bite. At least not as hard as your sister does." He winked at Mela while making a play of rubbing the arm she'd mauled. Then he reached over and shook Jurl's hand. "It's nice to meet you Jurl."

"You too. Now come on inside. Dinner should be done soon enough." He turned to Kela. "Hadn't expected you tonight dear, is everything ok?"

"Yes, King Farrick instructed me to stop by after we were done getting James some gear. I figured we could all have dinner together." She replied as they turned toward the door. Jurl's arm was draped around her shoulder, and hers was wrapped around his waist.

"He's a wise king." Jurl said. Mela and Tilo ran in front of them to grab the door. James followed behind the couple.

God, for little kids those two sure run fast. I don't think I'd be able to keep up even sprinting. He thought. *No wonder Mela was able to hit me before I could even react.*

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Dinner was delicious. A large cut of meat that visibly reminded James of a prime rib slab was herbed and roasted to medium. Oddly it tasted faintly of fish when he tried it, but not to the point of being off putting. It was served along side some potatoes that had been cooked in the drippings and some bread balls that had been stuffed with mushrooms and some kind of minced meat. The two children were also given some raw ground meat that had looked very much like uncooked ground beef. James, Jurl, and Kela also drank a nice dark ale that James thought tasted like an even heavier version of Guinness.

They talked while they ate. To James's surprise, though he didn't know why it surprised him, Jurl wasn't a warrior or hunter or anything like that. He was actually an architect and master stone mason. It turned out that he had actually designed and built the house they were in as a way to earn the approval of Kela's parents.

He also learned that Mela and Tilo were twins, apparently common among werewolves, and were six years old. He learned that they went to a school designed specifically for were-pups (as he learned they were called). Apparently the emotional nature of children could make their lycanthropy somewhat dangerous in normal school settings. They still played with children during off time, but they had to be careful. Heavy punishments could occur if an unsanctioned turning occurred, whether it was a child's fault or not.

Jurl and Kela it turned out were childhood friends and had practically been raised together. They'd fallen in love when they were just teens and once they'd figured out their careers had become a mated pair. Werewolves it seemed didn't officially marry, at least not in a legal sense. A

werewolf's pack could change at any time, and werewolves were socially beholden to the desires of their pack leaders. For better or worse. But the two of them had avoided all that drama.

For starters they, unlike most werewolf couples, had never determined who was pack leader between them. They didn't see the need. Both of them had stable, highly paying, highly respected jobs in the city. And while it was true that Jurl spent more time raising the children, it was equally true that Kela's title as captain of the guard made her something of a superhero in the children's eyes.

Regardless, looking at the family interact, James could tell that this household had only ever known loving, respecting, relationships. It was nice, and it made him just a little homesick.

After dinner Mela challenged James and her brother to a game of tag outside. James, naturally, was it. James was happy to learn that the game of tag was apparently a multiverse constant. Though he very much doubted his chances of catching the little were-pup.

His doubts were well founded. He couldn't catch either of them.

After about twenty minutes of frantically, and futilely, chasing the two pups James had to concede defeat. Walking up to where Jurl and Kela were relaxing on the small patio behind the house and saying as much, before tagging Kela on the shoulder.

"You're." He took a long agonizing breath. "It." And then he plopped down on the ground and splayed out, breathing heavily.

"What?" Kela asked clearly upset at the distraction from nuzzling Jurl.

"Can't..... keep.... up." James panted. "All..... you.... dude"

"I believe the children may have killed your new pack leader dear." Jurl added.

"Ugh fine." Kela sighed as she stood up. "I guess I'll play some more with my beloved pups." She gave Jurl a quick kiss before turning and walking out into the yard. "MEL!!! TILO!!! GUESS WHO'S COMING TO GET YOU!!!!"

This was answered by squeals laughter and a cry of "Oh, no fair!" And then Kela was running, and James thought he understood how she had earned the last name Swiftrunner.

Compared to Kela's speed the children had practically been running in slow motion.

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After James had recovered a bit, Jurl had stood up and asked him to come inside and help with cleaning up a bit. James was more than happy to help.

But Jurl had ulterior motives to the request.

As James was washing dishes in the startlingly modern looking sink. Jurl, who was drying the dishes, suddenly spoke to him.

"James how are you liking it here?"

"Oh your place is nice. It's amazing that you built this by yourself." James replied.

"Oh, well, thank you. But I meant HERE. As in, this world."

"Oh...." James had to think for a minute. "I don't know really." He paused. "It's a beautiful place. I mean, the castle, the town, hell the sky. And all the people are amazing. It's like walking through a Lord of the Rings book, or World of Warcraft, or Skyrim's 30th anniversary re-release." Jurl's face had a confused look when James turned to face him. "Sorry, I know you don't understand those references. What I'm saying is. This is incredible. I mean, I just had dinner with a family of werewolves. And it didn't even feel weird." He thought for a second. "Or you know, it MOSTLY didn't feel weird. It was still a little weird."

"Well that's good to hear I suppose."

"Yeah. But I'm also supposed to be some kind of world saving hero." James said while looking at his feet. "And I don't even know what I'm supposed to do."

"I imagine that can be a difficult burden to carry." Jurl said.

"Yeah." James said meekly.

"Look. I'm not a very godly wolf, Kela isn't either for that matter." Jurl said. "BUT. I can't deny the god's wisdom in these things. They've managed to keep the world spinning so far. We have to assume that this decision will continue that trend." He looked at James. "For better or worse."

"Yeah I know. Kela said just about the same thing."

"Speaking of Kela." Jurl said.

"Yeah?"

"You should have heard Princess Amina ranting up a storm, stomping from one side of the house to the other, talking about how you'd shot her. You know, when she came and told me what happened."

James winced. "Yeah. She punched me in the face." His jaw was still a little tender.

Jurl chuckled. "Not surprised. She's got a bit of a temper."

"To say the least."

"But I must admit. When I heard what had happened." Jurl paused. "I understood her anger."

James stopped looked up. *Oh.* He thought. *This is one of THOSE talks.*

"James, what do you know of being a pack leader?" Jurl asked.

"Almost nothing." James admitted. "Kela only gave me the basics. I guess I kinda outrank her?"

"Hmm. Yes that does sound like Kela's way of teaching. Especially when it comes to soldiers. Give them the basics, let them figure out the rest the hard way. Correct as needed." He shook his head. "It took a while to get her NOT to raise our kids that way too."

"Her and Sergeant Odie would've gotten along well." James said reluctantly. "He was the one that uh. He was the one that she...." It hurt to bring it back up.

"That she killed?"

"Yeah." James replied. His face had grown hard.

"I'm sorry. Amina told me about it. But it's-"

"The wolf's way?" James interrupted.

"Yes." Jurl admitted. After a moment of awkward silence he began speaking again. "She takes it seriously you know? The wolf's way I mean."

"I don't even know what that means. What? Some kind of tribal, feral animal thing?" James asked.

"Mmm yes, essentially." Jurl replied. "Your world does have wolves yes? Not werewolves apparently, but normal, wild wolves?"

"Yeah."

"Then you probably know the basics." Jurl said. "Wolves work best in packs. Obey the pack leader, but don't be afraid to become the pack leader. Survive, or else embrace your death with honor. Protect the young. Grant the injured and mortally sick a chance at a dignified death."

^("It wasn't dignified.") James muttered.

"Maybe not by your standards. But Kela didn't know that at the time. You will find that she often acts before thinking. But never maliciously."

"Doesn't make it right." James said.

"No. I suppose it doesn't" Jurl relented. "Still, I am sorry about it James."

"Yeah... Thanks."

"Oh, and James." Jurl said.

"Yeah?"

"If I ever find that you have abused your position as her pack leader. Or if you ever shoot her again. Or wave your privates about in her face again." He waved a fork about in a rather suggestive manner. James grimaced at the memory. "I will take that position from you by force. Even if that means killing you. Understood?"

"She told you about that?"

"A large part of our relationship is honesty. I understand it was incidental. But I stand by what I said." Jurl replied. "Now. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Sorry about that." James replied meekly.

"Good. You seem like a good enough person. I doubt it will ever be an issue." Jurl gestured through the opening between the kitchen and the dining/living room. "Besides, the children seem to like you. I'd hate to take their new friend from them. Plus the king would probably have me beheaded."

James looked through the opening and saw that Kela was splayed out on the oversized couch, sleeping. Mela and Tilo were resting on her chest. The two were-pups were curled up into little balls of fur.

Jurl spoke up again. "Now come on. We'll set up our attic room for you. Then you can help me carry those two little rascals to their beds. Once Kela starts snoring there's really no moving her. And nothing short of a war horn will wake her" Sure enough James heard the chainsaw starting, and thought he heard a smaller version of it coming from one of the pups. "You can spend the night."

They actually curl up like puppies, and at least one of them has Kela's snore. James thought. *Oh my god that's fuckin' adorable.*

----------PA-PA-PA-PAGE BREAKER!!----------

Back at the castle.

In the summoning room.

A small orange circle sparked about five feet off the ground.

It wasn't over the summoning circle, but off to the side a few yards.

It didn't last long. A few seconds at most.

And it was small. Maybe the size of a fingertip, or a dime.

Nothing came through it.

And then the room went dark again.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qijhh6/wait_is_this_just_gate_13/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (11/?)

After a short trip back to Kela's quarters, so they could drop off James's new armor and Kela's ceremonial armor, the two of them headed into town to get James some clothes. Kela was wearing simpler clothes and only her breastplate. There was still the surcoat with the wolf and shield on it. But James imagined that this must be her equivalent to casual work attire.

The town was, to put it simply, amazing. It reminded James of a trip he had taken one summer to visit some friends in Italy. The cobbled roads, rustic houses, small cafes, and shops scattered randomly about the town. People walked about with baskets of groceries and other supplies, some walked in small groups that looked to be heading to early dinners, or maybe the bars.

Speaking of people, James had never seen more variation in his life. There were other werewolves like Kela. They all seemed to notice her, most of them even nodding. There were orcs like Kraug, some more of the glowing hair people like he'd seen in the bathes (but no more twin pairs), more of the large wriggling tattoo people, and all manner of other kinds of people. He saw the pointed ears of elves, the short stout (bearded) bodies of dwarves, people he couldn't even think of names for. And of course he saw humans too.

What was even better was that there seemed to be no hostility anywhere. He didn't see anyone getting turned away from stores or restaurants. He didn't see any fights, well minus a scuffle between some orcs and dwarves, but Kela assured him that that was normal. A quick snarl from Kela and the two groups snapped out of it.

"Evenin' Capn'." One of the dwarves said.

"Evening Pounder. Anything I need to worry about?" Kela asked.

"Nah, nah." The orc that Pounder had just been grappling with interjected. "Just a bit of a row."

"Yeah, nothin special." Pounder agreed.

"Good. Keep it that way." Kela said, already turning to leave. "I better not hear any reports of damaged property, and if any of you get hurt, fix it yourselves!" She yelled as they left.

After a few steps James spoke. "This place is amazing Kela. Were those dwarves?"

"You know of dwarves?" She asked curiously.

"Yeah. Say was that a man, or a woman dwarf?"

"Pounder?" She asked, confused.

"Yeah."

"You saw the beard right?" She drew her hand down from her chin to indicate a beard. "Pounder's either a man or else he's the most hideous dwarf woman in existence." She assured him.

"Ok, so dwarf women DON'T have beards in this world." James noted.

"Do they in yours?" She asked.

"Depends on which books you're reading." James said casually. Kela was visibly disturbed at the idea of bearded she-dwarves. "But seriously. This place is incredible. I mean, this place is so old school, and everyone seems so relaxed." He gestured at a group of people dining at a cafe across the street. "Look, elves, dwarves, orcs, a few other kinds of people. All hanging out and having a meal. No fighting or racist bullshit. That's so cool."

"Yes.... Very cool?" She said, unsure. "Is that not common in your world?"

"Oh it is. Or at least it is nowadays. It wasn't always." He said with some remorse. "But in our fantasy stories, since that's basically what this world resembles, most of the races have rivalries with each other. Some of them are even openly hostile with each other."

"Really? That doesn't sound very fun. Why would your fantasy stories be written like that?" She asked. "That doesn't sound very fantastic."

"I don't know. I didn't write any of them." He replied, he thought for a moment. "Maybe it was just the writers trying to draw a parallel with our world. You know, help people relate to the stories. Like I said, we weren't always so.... universally friendly... in my world. There was a lot of hatred back in the day. Still is. But... It's a lot better than it used to be."

"Well, that's good I suppose." She gestured at a shop up ahead. "Come, we're almost at the first shop we're going to hit."

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Dude. My life has gotten fuckin' weeeeeiiiird. James thought as he tried on a hat that had several large green feathers sticking out of the top.

"Psssst, James." Kela said.

"Hmm?"

"That's a woman's hat." Kela informed him.

"Oh, right. On my world we call these macaroni." James joked.

"What?"

"Oh nothing. Just a terrible joke." James assured her.

"Fair enough." She responded. And then they moved onto the next shop.

After several hours, and several more clothing shops, they had finally finished gathering what Kela assured him he would need. Several pairs of pants (none of them as comfortable as his jeans back home) for both training and meeting with nobility, numerous shirts, several jackets, two pairs of boots, one pair of dress shoes, some underwear (not as bad as he'd expected) and a hat, and James was considered properly attired.

He even worked with a tailor for a good while trying to recreate his dress uniform. He'd been unsure if they had understood his requirements until they pulled out a piece of parchment and drew what they thought he'd meant. They'd actually gotten pretty close, and after a few adjustments they got it about as close as James thought they could. He figured he would probably need them from time to time.

He decided to keep wearing his uniform for the rest of the night, since it was already worn and he was comfortable in it. The rest of the clothes were sent back, via courier, to Kela's quarters for them.

As the sun began to set, the sky had turned a mixture of dark blue and orange since the sun was behind the planet's rings, they rounded a bend. They'd left the main part of the city some twenty minutes before and had since been walking through what James thought of as "light farmland". Though Kela's description of the area made James realize that it was effectively the old fashioned version of the suburbs.

"There it is." Kela said, pointing. "Home." She had a big smile on her face.

The home she gestured at was a small, two story, cottage, made of grey and brown stone masonry and a tiled roof. It had what James guessed was about two acres of land around it that was closed off by a matching stone wall about four feet high. In one section of the land was a small area where some kind of fruit or vegetables were growing, and in the rest of it were a few pine trees and one willow tree from which hung a bench. The lights were on inside and smoke drifted out of a small chimney in the middle of the roof. He could hear loud voices coming from inside.

Kela opened the small wooden gate very slowly. As she did she whispered to James.

"Be very quiet, and brace yourself."

"What? Why?" He asked, also whispering.

"You'll see." She replied cryptically.

As they got about halfway from the gate to the house, sneaking the whole way, James noticed that the voices from inside the house had gone quiet.

"Hey Kela." He whispered. "Weren't there people talking just a minute-" Suddenly he was bowled over by a snarling ball of fur about the size of a rottweiler. It had come from the right side so fast that he hadn't had time to react. Kela meanwhile had been hit from the left side. Though she had maintained her footing.

"WHAT THE HELL!?!" James yelled. He was doing everything he could to get it off of him, but it was chewing on his right arm, only being stopped by the jacket sleeve covering it. The thing currently clawing at him looked like a cross between a german shepherd, some kind of rabid hell hound, and..... a little kid. Then he heard laughter coming from Kela.

Suddenly it dawned on him.

The little werewolf pup stopped chewing on his arm and looked at him curiously. It had the same fur as Kela, but its eyes were a bright blue. The hair on it's head was longer too, and seemed to be braided on the sides. It was even wearing a shirt and some blue overalls.

"Who are you?" It asked in a slightly lisping, and lightly rumbling, voice.

"Who are you?" James asked.

"Mel get off of him and come over here and give your mother a hug!" Kela yelled.

The little wolf pup excitedly looked over to where Kela and another small pup were rolling around in the dirt. Mel's tail was wagging at about a hundred miles per hour, James noticed.

Oh my god... James thought. *They actually do wag their tales when they're excited.*

"Momma!" Mel yelled before jumping off of James and sprinting full speed into an attack hug aimed at Kela. Kela caught her and spun, going into another set of rolls in the dirt that both pups were happy to take part in.

James picked himself up, dusting off his pants and jacket. He checked his arm, but it wasn't really hurt. He might get some bruises but nothing

crazy. Not like the little werewolf could've gotten through the jacket anyways. He'd been told it was interwoven with Kevlar fibers to stop knives and other attacks. Luckily that part seemed to have checked out.

"Wait." He said. "You have kids?" He asked, though Kela was too preoccupied to answer.

Standing in the doorway of the house, unnoticed by James, stood another werewolf with grey and brown fur. It was taller than Kela by nearly a foot. As Kela and the two pups rolled and frolicked in the walkway to the gate, James watched from the side.

And the large wolf watched James very carefully from its position at the front door.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qhu873/wait_is_this_just_gate_12/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (10/?)

Writers note: IDK how to do the first/next/last stuff. Don't care to learn, waffle takes care of that anyways. so you get the next best thing. here's the previous chapter[*https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qfqyab/wait_is_this_just_gate_9/*](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qfqyab/wait_is_this_just_gate_9/)*. Also, in your imagination I want you to imagine Kraug with Idris Elba's voice/accent. I'm the writer, so that's canon.*

James had never met a quartermaster who was more quartermaster-ish than Kraug.

He had also never seen an actual Orc before.... like Kraug.

When they rang the bell hanging over the quartermaster counter, a loud crashing sound was heard in the room behind. Followed by some loud swearing, using several words that James didn't recognize, but he understood the emotions behind them just fine.

And then a nearly eight foot tall dark green and brown skinned behemoth stepped into view. At first the behemoth's head wasn't even visible because it was up above the window at the counter. He had to lower it down to speak to them, revealing a face that looked like it had been used as a punching bag for his entire life and two huge tusks, one of which was broken about an inch below it's point. His left eye was sewn shut, a scar running from the top of his head, over the eye and down the side of his neck. He was wearing a leather apron covered in pouches with tools hanging from the belt.

James stared, mouth agape at the mountain of a creature.

"AHA!" The orc exclaimed. "The great and glorious wolf captain graces Kraug with her presence."

"Well." Kela replied. "Someone has to class this place up a bit. Remind you of what a real soldier looks like." James stood to the side watching the two of them, giant monstrosities that they were, stare each other down.

Then the orc's tusked mouth broke into a smile. Kela's followed suit. The two of them clasped arms at the wrist.

"How are ya fuzzball?" The Kraug asked?

"Didn't you hear? I got killed, new pack leader." She gestured to James.

"This little runt?" The quartermaster reached out and lifted James up by his shoulders. James felt like an action figure being handled by a child it had just been gifted to. "He's puny. Even by Human standards. And why's his face look like that?" The orc's hands almost entirely encompassed James's rib-cage.

"I could ask you the same question you moldy leather scrotum!" James exclaimed, angry at the manhandling.

"HA!" Kraug looked at Kela, still not putting James back on his feet yet. "He talks like he actually has a set of tusks in his head." Kraug began looking at James's mouth. "You got tusks hiding in there little man?"

"Keep manhandling me like this and maybe you'll find out! Put me down!"

"I would listen to him Kraug." Kela interrupted. "He will do it. Hell, he tried fighting me, ass in the wind, with no weapons."

"Really?" The orc asked, incredulously. "That must've been a sight. You must be packin' a set o' giant's balls if you thought you could fight a werewolf like that. Much less the capn' o' the guard."

^("More accurate than you might think.") Kela grumbled to herself.

"What?" Kraug asked. James was curious if he'd heard her correctly too.

"Nothing." Kela replied.

"Put me down!" James yelled, kicking and flailing like an angry toddler. But the orc's grip was unyielding.

"Alright, alright." Kraug said as he placed James back on his feet. "Now what can I do for you two?"

"James is the new summoned hero. The king has ordered that he be fitted for some proper armor so that we can test his combat prowess." Kela stated. "Got anything that'll fit him?"

Kraug looked unimpressed. "Him?" He said pointing at James. "I mean, I see the badge. But really? Him?"

"Dude. I'm standing right here." James said.

"Yeah, and?" Kraug asked, uncaring.

"Come on Kraug." Kela interjected. "You know how the summoning works. The Gods choose as they please. Now can we get him fitted or not?"

The orc sighed. "Yeah yeah. I'll see what I got." He tossed a knotted piece of string at Kela, who caught it easily. "You still remember what I taught you, right?" He asked.

"Of course."

"Well then, get him measured up. I already got his torso. Get his arms and legs." With this the orc stepped back into the room on the other side of the counter, and out of sight. James could hear clattering and clanging as the orc rummaged through his stores.

"Alright James. Arms out like you're hugging a giant, feet shoulder width apart." Kela instructed him as she approached with the string.

"Like I'm what?"

She grabbed his arms and lifted them up and out to his side. Then she kicked his feet out until he was standing in a position that felt like he was stuck mid jumping jack. "Stay like that." She said.

"Ok?" James replied, and followed her instructions.

The werewolf quickly circled James and placed the string on his thigh, holding it in place with her thumb. It dropped down and she pulled the other end until it was taut and resting against his ankle. Then she used her pointer finger's claw to scratch a symbol into the dirt near his foot.

Then she wrapped the string around his thigh and did the same. She repeated the process for his calf. After getting both legs she did effectively the same thing for his arms. She also measured his feet, and his hands (both palm width and finger lengths). She scratched different symbols into the ground for each measurement. Lastly she measured from the base of his neck, all the way over his head until it touched his nose, and once around the widest part of his head.

Just as she was getting this last measurement Kraug reappeared in the window, a metal breastplate and back plate in his hands, as well as a leather undercoat.

"You always were the quickest fitter I had." He said, admiring Kela's notes in the dirt.

"Well, you made me measure myself every other day during my changes. I learned quick." Kela replied.

Kraug clambered over the desk and kneeled. He absentmindedly handed James the jacket and plating. "Here try that on." He said, but he was focusing on the notes. Curiously, James noted, Kraug wasn't writing anything down. He seemed to be taking mental notes, despite the large amount of symbols scratched into the dirt.

James walked over to the counter and unzipped his uniform jacket, placing it on the counter. He put the undercoat on in it's place. It smelled of some kind of oil or salve, probably to keep it from cracking he thought. But when he put it on it seemed to fit well, a little snug for his taste. But he knew that was probably necessary to make it fit correctly under the plates. It opened and closed sideways, compared to what he was used to, with a set of toggles on his right side. The sleeves were a bit long, so he bunched them up a bit.

The back and breast plates were made of a dull grey steel and fit over his head, just like his IOTBS plate carrier had. It had straps that adjusted how high it sat on the shoulders. A set of buckles on each side fastened it in place over the leather jacket. The small shoulder plates rested just right on the corners of his shoulders.

He didn't have any experience with medieval armor, only the plate carriers that he'd been issued throughout his time in the Army. But somehow, after adjusting the straps, this simple setup felt more comfortable than those ever had. Although he did have a feeling that he would overheat very quickly compared to his normal gear. He turned to face the others, who were still busy analyzing Kela's notes.

"Well, how do I look?" He asked.

"Well well well." Kraug said. "He actually knows how to dress himself." The orc walked up and began checking the fit.

"He was wearing armor, of a sort, when he came here." Kela said. She had a slight grin while looking at him in his armor. "I imagine the concept is fairly straightforward no matter what world you're in."

Kraug wasn't listening, he was too busy checking the armor. "Sleeves a touch long, have to shorten those. Shoulder plates are fittin' real nice. Here, twist and turn real quick."

James did as he was told.

"How'd that feel?" Kraug asked.

"Not bad." James replied. "Definitely won't be doin' yoga in this. But not bad."

"Who's Yoga?" He looked at Kela. "He already found a bed warmer? I thought he'd only been here a few days." he slammed an oversized knuckle into James's new chest-plate. "Not bad, HERO!"

"What? No." James responded. "Yoga's an exercise, dude."

"I bet she is. Or is it a he? No judgment either way little man."

"Are we good Kraug?" Kela interrupted. "We still have things to do. Besides, the king explicitly ordered me to pay a visit to Jurl before the day ends."

"Did he now? King takes that much interest in your love life eh?"

"Kraug!" Kela exclaimed.

"I'm just messin with ya fuzzball." He slammed James on the back. "Keep that. It fits well enough and it'll do in a pinch. Come back tomorrow and I should have a full set scrounged up, and a better jacket. If I don't then it'll be burnin' up over at Breakbacker's forge."

"Thank you." Kela said.

"Uh yeah, thanks." James added.

Kraug grabbed James by the shoulder and pulled him so he was in front of and facing the giant orc.

"Hero eh?" he asked. He gave James one last looking over. "Hmmm maybe." Then he stuck his arm out.

James took it, clasping it at the wrist like he'd seen Kela do. Just for good measure he squeezed as hard as he could.

"Ha!" Kraug laughed. "Yeah, maybe. Welcome to the world quarter pint."

Then he clambered back over the counter again and disappeared into the room.

James looked back at Kela. "So.... shopping time?"

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qh23xt/wait_is_this_just_gate_11/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (9/?)

Writer's note: whaaaaat two in a day? That's what I get for drinking too much coffee. Enjoy

James and King Farrick ended up speaking for nearly four hours. Long enough that several attendants ended up dropping off a meal for everyone in attendance. Sandwiches, simple enough, though they were also given wine and water. Kela joined them for the meal, helping James understand certain things the King spoke about. But also listening to the things James spoke about.

The King wasn't rude, and didn't seem to flaunt his power. On top of that, not only did he not speak to the rest of the people there as if speaking down to them, but he actually seemed to know them all personally. There was no calling someone by their rank or profession. The King would refer to them by name, usually first name, and people seemed happy to respond. When new attendants, or lords, or officers, or really anyone walked in to the room the king would greet them personally. Even if the guards saw fit to announce them, though that was not very common apparently.

James was surprised to find that not only did the king NOT seem like a villain as they were talking, as he had first thought upon seeing him. But he actually thought he liked the man. It felt like talking to an old friend, or maybe an uncle that you hadn't seen for some time.

The King also seemed enamored with what James was telling him. He was familiar with the concept of Democracy, as well as the other forms of government that James mentioned when talking about home. Though some of them did have different names here. The king had looked amazed when James talked about vehicles, both the ones that he'd been trained to work on for the military, and just plain old cars like the Mustang he'd driven on the other side. The king was excited thinking of the idea of not needing carriages or horses to move people and goods about the land.

Planes and space travel had made the king accuse him of lying, albeit jokingly, for just a moment. James countered by admitting that the dual moons and rings had blown his mind, and that NASA would blow their collective loads at the sight of them. Which of course the king found ridiculous.

The cellphone that James had given over to the Kela the day before also brought numerous questions. James admitted that he couldn't explain the specifics of how it worked, but gave a basic rundown of the concept. Once he had the king explained that in a world without magic it would make sense to use so many resources to establish long range communication. The ability to recall information on a mobile device seemed worth looking into, but messages could be sent magically.

James meanwhile was curious about, of course, magic. He also wanted to know about the different people of the land, and what animals there were, how technology had progressed, whether or not people had to level up to get new abilities. The king was more than happy to talk about all of it, though he had no idea what leveling up was.

The main discussion though. The one that each topic seemed to eventually funnel back towards, was what the gods had meant for James to do in this land. The king didn't know. Neither did Kela, or anyone else that the king had informed of the message the gods had given.

"Learn from them? Learn from who? Me?" James asked. "Why word it like that? I mean, they're gods, I'd think they would've known I was the only one who SURVIVED-" He looked angrily at Kela for a moment, "the trip here. Who else could they be talking about?"

"I don't know." The king admitted. "We've been trying to figure out the same thing. I mean I imagine that the 'Follow his lead' bit refers to you." He gestured towards James with the hand that was holding his wine. "But we don't understand the 'THEM' part of it either. Bloody GODS and their damnable cryptic Threlshit."

"Well, you're the king. Your highness. " James said awkwardly, it was odd to talk to someone so high ranked in such an informal setting. "What do you think I should do? I mean, I'm just a wrench monkey grunt who currently doesn't know his asshole from a meplie fruit? Pardon the language."

"Ha, I like that." The king replied. He thought for a moment. "Ah hell. The gods sent a soldier to us. Kela you're a soldier what do you think he should do? You're better at seeing things head on than I am."

Kela flinched a bit at the mention of her name, she'd assumed the King had forgotten she was here. He'd been so wrapped up in talking to James.

"Um. I mean, I could run him through some drills, maybe throw him into the sparring ring. See if he can handle a weapon." She thought for a second. "We'd have to fit him for some armor first. Speaking of, he only has one spare set of clothes, and they're his military uniform. We should probably get him some stuff that won't draw too much attention."

"Hmm not bad. It would be nice to know how our warriors stack up next to you. And you would draw a lot of attention if you walked around in your uniform everywhere you go." The king said. "You are allowed to wear other clothes yes? When you're off duty? If not I understand, we can maybe have the royal tailors try to-"

James interrupted the train of thought. "I can wear civilian clothes. Uniforms only for when I'm on duty. I don't even know whether I'm considered on duty right now."

"Oh splendid." The king replied. "Well I guess we have a current plan, at least for a day or so. Is there anything you would LIKE to do?"

"I can think of a huge list of stuff I'm curious about. But I have a feeling that that list is gonna get longer every second that I'm here." James admitted. It had so far. "But.... well. Can I learn magic? Like, any magic at all?"

"I have no idea. Can you?" The king asked. James shrugged his shoulders and put on his best I-Have-No-Idea face.

"Well than. We have a plan. Kela, there's still a good bit of the day left." It was only a little past noon at the time. "Take Specialist Choi to the quartermaster and have him fitted for armor. Then take him into the town and fetch him some proper clothes." He turned to James. "I'll speak to our mages and see what they think about teaching you some magic. Shouldn't be too hard. They taught my eldest, so they can probably teach anyone."

"Yes sir." replied Kela.

"Also, I know you missed your rest period. Swing by your home and see Jurl, even if it's only for a few minutes. I heard you howling last night. I'm sure he's worried. And put it all on the crown."

"Yes sir. Thank you sir."

He turned back to James. "James. Allow me to apologize to you personally." His face had a very somber expression. He placed a hand on James shoulder. "I'm very sorry about the nature of your arrival here. I know you weren't given a choice. But I'm also glad that you're such an amicable person. And I'm deeply sad about your friends. I promise that we will do everything in our power to make up for it. We have a funeral pyre being built for them, it should be done by tomorrow."

James knew, he didn't know how, that the king was speaking from his heart.

"Thanks. Um, I appreciate that." He didn't know what else he could even say.

The king nodded. "Oh. Before you go. I have to give you this." He pulled a badge from his coat pocket and handed it to James. It was made of some kind of green metal that was formed into the shape of an eye with several sets of wings protruding at different angles. The pupil of the eye was a small gemstone that seemed to change color when he held it at different angles.

"What is it?" James asked.

"It's the mark of someone who is 'God-Chosen'. It lets people know that if they mess with you AT ALL that they may end up dealing with me." The king signaled to a small group of people on the other side of the room. "Wear it. It'll also allow you ALMOST free roam of the castle. Some exceptions obviously."

"Uh, thanks." James said and pinned it to his chest pocket.

"Hmm. The camouflage does blend well doesn't it?" The king mused. "Anyways, I've put off my other responsibilities long enough. It was good to meet you James. Please let me know if you figure out what the gods meant and I'll do the same. Oh and let me know if my daughter causes you too much trouble" He turned, and just like that the king was swallowed by the group he had called over, and was being badgered for all kinds of approvals, complaints, and requests.

"You too." James called. But the king was already gone. He turned back to Kela. "So, armor?"

"And a shopping trip apparently." The she-wolf replied. "Oh and I think we'll have dinner with my mate." She smiled at the thought.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qgckd4/wait_is_this_just_gate_10/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (8/?)

Writer's note: I had to edit this because I forgot the last little bit at the end. My bad. enjoy.

The royal speaking room was actually nowhere near what James had expected.

He had expected a massive hall filled with stands and standing room, headed by a set of steps up to the royal throne. There would be knights in shining armor, holding halberds or spears lining every wall. He imagined that the king would sit or stand there near the throne, addressing the people in the crowd, giving royal decrees and great speeches, ordering beheadings.

He thought about that last part with grim worry.

Instead what he found reminded him more of one of his college lecture halls. There was a small stage with a podium front and center, though there was still a throne set some feet behind it. But the stage was set below all the seats and desks arrayed out from it in a half arc. If it hadn't been for the fact that everything was made in that medieval fashion he'd been seeing ever since he got here, he might have mistaken it for the congressional chamber, or maybe a UN delegation room. There were still knights stationed at each entrance and every corner of the room though.

As they entered the room Kela took two fast steps in front of him, "Hold for a second, I have to announce you." She said. Before standing at attention.

She was wearing a set of armor that was much more polished than the set he had shot. Her torso, upper arms, and upper legs were covered in gleaming plates of what looked like steel, though there was a slight yellowish tint to it. These plates were lined with golden (though he was certain it was brass or bronze or something) pins and fittings. The padding underneath it was a dark brown bordering on black that seemed to blend into her fur almost perfectly. Over all this was a red and gold surcoat with a silver and green embroidered wolf's head over a shield. She carried a rounded shield that was almost as tall as James was, a double headed battle axe that was taller than James was, and of course on her hip was her sword.

If he was honest. She looked badass. *That's some Lord of the Rings, heavy metal shit man. I need to get me a set of armor like that.* He thought, though he'd never admit it to Kela.

"Specialist James Choi, of the United States Army!" She announced in her deep rumbling voice. "Son of Margaret DeLaRosa, and Anthony Choi!

Summoned Hero of the Era of the Stellar Eagle! Newly blooded pack leader to Captain Kela Swiftrunner!"

Shit. I already have all those titles? James wondered.

The King was leaning against the podium casually when they entered. He was facing the side of the room and talking to someone sitting there. But he quickly turned to regard James when he heard the announcment.

He was tall, at least six feet to James's five eleven. He also had swept back, raven black hair with grey streaks here and there. He had a full, matching, beard that went down almost to his chest, it had beads scattered in the handful of braids that were in it. He also had a scar running from the corner of his mouth almost to his ear. Where it ran there was no beard hair, only scar tissue. James guessed that he was in his mid to late forties.

Oddly he was wearing an outfit that vaguely reminded James of an old western, or maybe an old gangster movie. Where he had expected a puffy shirt with a frilly neck thing, instead he saw a grey dress shirt that looked like it was right out of any clothing store from his world. Where he'd expected those weird half pant things and long socks that he'd seen every pompous movie king wearing, he instead saw black slacks, they were even creased. The only clothes that really seemed medieval were a long black leather coat with golden yellow fur around the collar, held shut by a gold jeweled plate that hung in front of his chest.

And of course, a crown. It was silver with golden spikes rising from the top.

This guy is giving off some major Disney villain vibes man. James thought.

"Specialist James Choi!" James's analysis of the king was abruptly interrupted. "Before you stands King Farrick Alvis Petravius. King of Petravus. Son of Marriana Pelrittos and Boldren Petravius. Warden of the God's Summoning Door. The Moon Lord. Sire of this domain and all it's lands!" At this last bit both she and the guards around the room slammed their pole-arms on the ground twice.

James bowed the way Kela had shown him before bringing him in. Left foot back half a step, left arm bent at the elbow held behind his back, right arm matching only in front of his stomach, bent at the waist.

"The honor is mine your highness."

And then the king smiled, and suddenly James felt foolish for thinking that he was a Disney villain. It was a warm smile that seemed to use the king's entire face. He hopped down from the stand and walked up to Kela.

"Kela! Great captain of mine! It has been too long." Kela stooped a little bit and the King embraced her in a hug. "I heard you let this new hero take you from my daughter's pack. Is this true? I assume it is from your announcement right now. But Amina won't shut up about it. She's very

cross about the whole thing." He had a booming voice that reminded James of someone he'd seen in a movie once, though he couldn't figure out who.

"Indeed. Your highness. He shot me three times in the chest. If he'd been using silver I'd be hunting in the moon fields now." Kela replied, embarrassed.

"Pah!" the king exclaimed. "It's about time someone outdid Amina. She needs to be shown up from time to time."

"Agreed." Kela said, matter of factly.

James was still bowing. Kela had told him not to move until the king addressed him directly.

"So." the king said, turning to James. "This is our new hero? Well stand up, let's have a look at you lad."

James finally stood up and faced the king. "Your highness." He said.

The king sized him up a bit. "Weird outfit."

"It is the uniform of his military, sir." Kela said.

"Really? There's no armor. and what's with all the weird colors?"

"It's called camouflage. It helps us blend in with our environment. And I do have some armor, but your people haven't given it back to me." James interjected.

"Ah, I see. And what exactly are you a 'specialist' in Mr. Choi?"

"You can just call me Choi if you want, no need for the mister part. Also in my military Specialist is simply a rank, roughly the equivalent of your 'secondary-sergeant' rank. But I am specifically trained as a mechanic for our vehicles. Also I was going to school to become a nurse." James said.

"A man as a nurse?" The king asked.

Sweet, old school gender roles. This definitely isn't gonna cause any awkwardness while I'm here. James thought sarcastically.

"Well, the intention was to eventually become a doctor." James replied. "But only if I ended up liking things as a nurse. In our world men and women can have almost any job they want. No limits."

"Most interesting." The king stroked his beard for a moment. "How has that worked out for your people? I'm asking honestly, it's an interesting concept." He also gestured to one of the nearby seats. "Please, let's sit. We have much to discuss." He said this while pulling the chair behind him so that he could sit in it. Kela walked over to one of the other guards, but kept glancing at the pair of them.

"Well. Some jobs had some uh.... issues, with gender roles. But that was years ago." James said. "Most job fields are pretty equally fielded by men and women. And people seem happier to be able to choose whatever job they think they'd be best at. Even if it doesn't always work out."

"Really? So it's not uncommon to see a man as a nurse?"

"Not at all." James replied. "Don't get me wrong. It is still mainly women who become nurses. But only barely. I'd say roughly thirty or forty percent of all nurses are men nowadays. Maybe more, I don't know the exact stats."

"Hmmm." The king waived at a young man who had been standing several yards away. "Stebas, you heard all that right?"

"Yes your highness." the young man replied.

"Good. Write that down. We shall speak with the Hospital Matron and see if that could be an avenue to dealing with her staffing issues."

"Yes your highness." Stebas said again as he pulled a pad of paper and a quill from his coat while taking a seat at a nearby table to write.

"What else can you tell me about your world?" The king asked James.

"Well, I'm not the smartest person out there. Also I'm only two years into my college education. Sooo, I can't give you the most detailed information. But I can still give you the basics." James said.

"Fantastic. I'd love to learn more about your world."

"Hold up. I thought we were going to be discussing what your 'gods' had said for me to do here."

"Ah, yes." The king said as if being reminded of a subject he didn't like talking about. "We were, and that is what I'm trying to do."

"Well. What did they say?" James asked. He wanted to know why his life had been thrown into a blender and set to puree.

"Well." The king said. "The gods. In their 'INFINITE' wisdom." He said this with incredible sarcasm and scorn. "Said only two things."

James waited.

"Learn from them, AND, follow his lead."

"Them?" James wondered.

----------PAGE BREAK----------

At the far end of the castle's research wing, several floors down, in a room warded against intrusion (but only of a magical nature) a single

chime rang out. Jame's phone lit up for just a moment. It had received a text message.

SPECIALIST CHOI THIS IS COLONEL SHAYNA MUHAMMED.YOUR MOTHER HAS RECEIVED YOUR MESSAGE AND IS HAPPY TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE OKFROM HERE ON OUT YOU REPORT TO ME AND ONLY MEYOUR PHONE IS BEING MONITORED THOUGH YOUR LOCATION IS CURRENTLY UNTRACKABLEREPORT IN WITH YOUR CURRENT STATUS IMMEDIATELY

IF ANYONE OTHER THAN SPECIALIST CHOI IS READING THIS. KNOW THIS. WE ARE DOING EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO GET HIM BACK.

YOU WILL ANSWER FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

A man in a set of mages gear watched the phone light up and read the message eagerly.

"Interesting." he said before writing down what he'd seen.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qfqyab/wait_is_this_just_gate_9/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (7/?)

James did not sleep well that night.

He didn't sleep well partly because he was a stranger in a strange land sleeping in a strange bed. A larger part was the fact that he'd been through a lot since he'd woken up that morning, he was still trying to process the fact that his friend and NCO was dead, and had died in his arms.

Oh yeah, there was also the fact that just one doorway away was a, supposedly badass, warrior WEREWOLF, loudly snoring away. On top of that, he had mistakenly assumed said werewolf was a guy for most of the day.

James wasn't typically a socially awkward guy. He was also fairly accepting of people's gender identities and sexuality. He himself was straight, and only thought of himself as "just a dude". But he knew plenty of people who swung the other way, or both ways, or no way at all. He new people who didn't agree with their born gender, and even a few who had had that surgically corrected. He didn't completely understand the idea himself, but he had never had a problem with that. And while he had occasionally mistaken a persons identifiers before he'd always been quick to apologize and correct himself.

But he'd assumed Kela was a male the whole day. He'd assumed that Kela and the princess had been flirting when they were arguing about their martial prowess. Good god he'd even asked about sleeping with her. Granted he'd been explicitly trying to ensure that that wasn't expected of him. But the she-wolf had clearly been aggravated at the mere notion of it.

Oh god, my dick was flopping around in her face when she had to restrain me. The thought made him feel like dying a little.

Embarrassment abounded. It had been one of the few times in his life where he had been so socially uncomfortable that he hadn't known how to process it. He'd simply apologized as much as he could and shut up as much, and as quickly, as possible.

Kela, to her credit, had actually been very understanding.

After realizing that the subject had never really come up, and also remembering that James really truly didn't actually know anything about her world, much less werewolves. She had explained that when werewolves were in full form, as she was currently, their genders were effectively indistinguishable to most people. Or at least to most people who hadn't spent their lives around werewolves.

People like James. Who had never even seen a werewolf outside of a movie or a Halloween party. And who, up until today, had kind of thought werewolves were lame.

After roughly twenty minutes of Kela explaining things, while James mostly just apologized or remained silent, the two had agreed to simply go to bed. James had a meeting with the King the next day, and would need his rest.

The last thing James thought before finally managing to fall asleep was. *I know it's not REALLY my fault. But I'm a fucking dumbass. A very tired, fucking dumbass. Also, holy hell it sounds like she's running a chainsaw in there.* Then he drifted off.

When James awoke the next morning, privately wishing that when he opened his eyes it would turn out he'd just had a really vivid dream, he did so to the familiar and lovely smell of bacon.

After brushing his teeth and shaving in the small bathroom (he was pleasantly surprised to find that it had running water) James dressed in his full uniform and knocked on the door between the rooms.

"Hey Kela. Can I come in?"

"Of course, breakfast is here." She replied.

When he opened the door he saw the most glorious sight since he'd gotten here. On the table that Kela was sitting at was a large platter piled high with fried eggs, diced and fried potatoes, some kind of green cubed....something, a small basket of rolls, and a large pile of thick cut heavily peppered bacon strips.

"Oh man." James exclaimed while taking a deep sniff of the breakfast. "Ok. I don't know enough about this place to know what level of society y'all are at. But if you got bacon then as far as I'm concerned, Y'all are alright."

"An odd way to judge a society. But I must admit, I would be most upset if bacon were not available somewhere." Kela agreed, smiling as she shoved an entire strip into her fanged maw and began chewing.

"Can I get some?" James asked as he sat down at the opposite seat.

"Of course. They only brought this to the room because you are here. Normally I would have to go down to the banquet hall for food. Or else the soldier's mess."

"Awesome. Say, what's this green stuff? It smells sweet." James asked, holding one of the green cubes on the end of his fork.

"Smeplies." Kela said as if it was obvious.

"Smep....lees?"

"A fruit that grows in the region on the other side of the Keybane River?" She said this as if simply reciting a fact that anyone should know, while also shoveling eggs into her mouth. "It helps with digestion, recovering from sickness, and helps sailors avoid salt sickness on long journeys."

"Right." James said. He shrugged and put the green cube in his mouth. His face immediately scrunched up. This stuff was sour. No, this stuff wasn't sour. It was evil.

Kela let out a loud guffaw. "Here." She said while skewering another green cube and dipping it in a small bowl of salt. "Like this." She put the salted fruit on his plate.

"God. It's like a grapefruit got amped up from eleven to a thousand." James said while struggling to un-scrunch his face. He forked the new piece and held it up. "This isn't gonna melt my tongue off is it?"

"Heh, no. Salt is the cure for pork, beef..... and smeplie face. That's the saying."

He reluctantly put the small fruit in his mouth and was immediately dumbstruck by the difference in flavor. Where the previous smeplie piece had been so sour he thought his cheeks would break his teeth. This piece was so sweet that it reminded him more of a piece of candy. It also vaguely reminded him of apple cider.

"Holy crap." James said. "That's a fuckin' huge difference dude." He quickly skewered two more pieces on his fork and dipped them into the salt pile as well. They were in his mouth before he'd even finished chewing the previous piece.

Kela watched, amused, as the young soldier across from her experienced something that most people in this land learned as toddlers.

James quickly piled his plate full of breakfast and began tucking in. "Sho, watsh the flan for today?" He asked.

"First off, practice some manners. The wolf in me would gladly devour this plate from the floor if I let it run the show. But even I don't speak with my mouth full."

James swallowed, "Sorry. Just didn't realize how hungry I was."

"But the main thing today," Kela continued, ignoring him. "is to introduce you to the King. When you meet him he will discuss what the gods have said regarding your summoning. Then the two of you will come to an agreement on your status here in the kingdom."

James gulped. "That sounds like a pretty big thing. Also, gods?"

"Indeed it is." Kela replied. "And yes, this world has gods. The land and it's people are at their mercy, and often live and die at the hands of their machinations." She paused. "Your summoning, was partly their doing. The summoners request someone who can save our world. And the gods make that determination and pull someone from the nearest realm in the periphery. For better or worse."

James needed to process that for a minute. Kela waited. She knew she'd just put a lot on his shoulders.

"So I'm expected to save this world?"

Kela nodded slowly. "That is the expectation. Though it is not for any of us to decide HOW you do so."

"What do you mean?"

Kela thought for a moment. She had to word this as best she could to avoid confusion.

"Well." She said. "This kingdom. Petravus. And it's royal family, Princess Amina's family. Has existed for nearly two thousand years." She thought for a moment longer. "Parts of the castle, and in this case specifically the summoning room. Have existed for nearly eight thousand."

"Shit. That's a long time."

"Indeed. And in those eight thousand or so years, twenty four separate summonings have occured. Yours included." She said. "Each one has been during a time of strife, or extreme stagnancy. And each summoning has had wildly different results."

"You guys have records of all the summonings? Also, what kinda of results?"

"We have records of MOST of the summonings. And as for the results. Well they vary." She replied.

"How so?"

"For starters. It's not always a person that comes through the portal. Even when it is a person, they are not always members of a recognizable race here in our world." She pointed at James. "Take yourself for instance. You are human." James looked at himself, suddenly unsure. "You've seen other humans here in the castle, hell the princess is human. And she punched you in the face."

"Well. Yeah." James responded.

"And yet your face. Your eyes. Your nose. The color of your skin." James knew where she was going. "I have traveled all over this land. And I can honestly say that I've never seen a human who looks like you. Not in any of the other nations I've visited either. YOU James. Are unique, for that alone. Even if nothing else about your anatomy is."

"So y'all aint got no Asians here?" James asked. This was actually legitimately a surprise. He'd never even considered that possibility.

"James I don't even know what that is."

"Damn. I don't even know why but I feel incredibly offended for some reason." He said while trying to think of all the other humans he had seen so far. It wasn't exactly a large number. But still, she was right. "That's real fucked up man." He said quietly, more to himself than anyone else.

"I understand your feelings. I was somewhat delighted when you knew what I was." Kela admitted. "But I became somewhat upset when I discovered that you only knew them as myths and fairy tales. I can't imagine what it must be like not to have your own kind here."

"Yeah.... I honestly don't know how to feel about that." James admitted.

"Regardless." Kela continued. "Sometimes it is not a person. One time it was a cluster of rabbits."

Really? Rabbits? James thought.

"You're clearly thinking the same thing the summoners did at the time. But the rabbits were accompanied by an emissary of the gods. Who gave instructions to eat several of the rabbits, and to release the rest of them into the wilds in different parts of the country."

"Shit. Rabbits are like, a super invasive species." James was honestly flabbergasted at the idea.

"Yes. That is very much the case." Kela replied. "But at the time our land was being destroyed by several species of invasive plants. Most of our animals had starved or had been increasingly hunted by starving people and omnivorous animals. To put it simply our land was in the middle of a food crisis."

Once again, James knew where she was going.

"Let me guess." he said. "The rabbits ate the invasive plants. And their rapid birth rate resulted in the people and animals of the land having a new abundant source of meat that also brought a balance back to the plants in the ecosystem."

"Exactly so. And in the course of only a few years, the famine ended. Both for the people of the land, AND, the wildlife." After a minute Kela continued. "That was a more.....esoteric summoning. A bit of a 'one off' as they say." Kela said.

"OK. But you also said that the summonings sometimes AREN'T good?"

"Several times the summonings have brought forth creatures, AND sometimes people, who have been...." She thought for a moment. "I don't want to say villainous. Because the King's ancestor was one of them. But....." She thought some more. "Let's just say that they seemed villainous at the time."

"Oooooook?"

"At times the summoning has brought forth people and creatures so evil or deadly that they effectively forced the nations of the world to work together." She paused. "Sometimes entire nations were wiped out or absorbed as a result. Sometimes the world was so destabilized that the old factions were completely reorganized into new ones. Entire societal shifts have occurred because of who or what was summoned. Sometimes for better. Sometimes for worse."

"Huh. I guess I kind of understand that."

"The best way to explain I think would be to ask you if there has ever been a person in your worlds history that was pivotal to society, good or bad." Kela said.

"Yeah. Yeah there have been people like that." His history books had been filled with them. The Jesus's, Hitlers, Typhoid Marys, Pol Pots, Stalins, Martin Luthers, and Martin Luther Kings. The dreaded Kardashians whose rise had marked the decline of society in the early two thousands. His world was still recovering from the shallow stupidity that clan had inflicted upon the world. "We have plenty of people who've been at the center of our world's changes in society."

"Well. "Kela said. "Imagine if they had never existed. Or imagine if they HADN'T existed until you summoned them."

"That thought experiment has existed in our world forever and a day. Yeah, 'Would you kill baby Hitler?' has been a social conundrum since before I was born."

"Well typically, when a summoning is performed. It is done solely to summon a Hero who can save us in our time of need." Kela reiterated. "But what we believe we need to survive. And what the gods think we need to survive." Kela shook her head. "They're not always the same thing."

"Well your gods are starting to sound an awful lot like the gods my world USED to worship." James replied.

"Who knows?" Kela asked. "Maybe they are one and the same."

"God, I sure hope not." James replied, not oblivious to the irony of that statement.

"Either way, we have literally and figuratively chewed the bacon long enough. It is time to ready you for an audience with the King." Kela said as she stood up.

"Sweet. How formal am I expected to be?" James asked.

Kela considered the question. "It can be hard to tell." She noticed the confused look on James' face. "You'll see."

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qfmwdf/wait_is_this_just_gate_8/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (6/?)

"We're....sharing a room?" James asked.

"Yes. Typically they would put you up in an ambassador's suite. But since you have blooded me and gained my allegiance I am honor bound to offer up my dwellings." Kela replied, matter of factly.

"Um.... OK so... I don't know the way werewolves do things." James said, concern evident in his voice. "We're not going to be all bundled up like a pair of dogs are we?" Kela bristled a little at the comparison. "No offense meant. I just don't know what any of this means." James legitimately didn't.

"If-" Kela responded, clearly annoyed. "that is your desire. Then we can. As my pack leader you are entitled to such a request."

"No no n-"

"But I would prefer. " Kela interrupted. "If you at least allowed me to discuss it with my mate."

"Kela I-" James was interrupted again. Because Kela was opening the door to said dwellings while continuing.

"But I believe that you should look at the lodgings before you jump to conclusions."

"O...K." James decided to listen and hold his tongue for a bit.

The entry room was effectively also an armor storage room. Standing on five separate racks were different sets of armor in different sizes and configurations. One Rack was empty, he guessed it was for the armor that

he... had shot. The other four had smaller sets of armor, the smallest of which looked like it could fit him, albeit snugly.

"Whose armors are those?"

"Mine." Kela replied.

"What?"

"Oh, right. I suppose we haven't gone over the specifics of how werewolves actually work. At least in this world." Kela said. "I asked about your world's 'depictions' of werewolves. But that's not how they work here."

"How do they work here? I mean, you haven't changed since I've seen you."

"And indeed you won't notice it." Kela stated. "The change is slow. Gradual. It occurs in line with the howling moon's." Kela paused. "That's the larger moon." When James nodded understanding the wolf continued. "It occurs in line with the howling moon's phases. The full moon, and as such my greatest form, occured four days ago. Over the course of the next forty five days I will become gradually more human. Hence the extra sets of armor, all of which are interchangeable as my form requires."

James hadn't even noticed that the two of them had continued into the main room.

"Huh. That's kinda cool I guess. Makes sense too. I mean the moon never actually goes anywhere." He looked at Kela. "It doesn't....go anywhere... does it?"

"No, it simply gets blocked by the other moon, and sometimes our planet's rings."

"Ok. Good." He didn't know why the concept of a roving moon worried him. But it did. This information was a relief. Then he realized where they'd walked and looked around. "Woah. Dude this room is sweet."

The werewolf cocked it's head to the side. *Ha, just like a dog.* James thought.

"Thanks? But it is simply a captain's room. Not terribly fancy..... or sweet?"

"Sweet is just a term for something unexpectedly nice." James said. "I kinda had something similar to my old barracks room in mind. Or you know, an officer's barracks room."

"Well as a captain I am occasionally expected to entertain, or keep an eye on, foreign dignitaries." Kela stated. The warning was pretty obvious. As the wolf said this they opened a set of doors that revealed an even larger and nicer bedroom. "As such this is actually the room you will be staying in." The subtext that that was what Kela would prefer was also obvious. "It's furnished more lavishly, for those potential

dignitaries. Besides, it requires you to pass through my room in order to leave."

"Ah.... Gotcha." James was actually impressed, that was just plain practical all around. And the room was very nice.

James was surprised to see his assault bag sitting on a chair, along with all of his uniform. It had been washed and pressed, and even the boots had been cleaned, and he could have sworn resoled though he doubted this place had rubber to do so. But as he rifled through his bag he noticed that all the electronics and actual gear was gone. It was just a spare set of clothes, his toiletry bag, and some little convenience items he'd packed for NTC.

Guess they're not dumb enough to let me get my phone back yet. Or anything else useful for that matter. He thought. *Totally fair.*

Suddenly a loud howling noise sounded from behind him, along with a light cold breeze. He jumped a little bit. When he did he saw that a door was open and moonlight was spilling in through it. The howl lasted nearly a minute and, to him at least, it sounded incredibly sad.

Outside the door was a small porch, on which was a small cushioned seat that reminded him of his grandmother's ottoman. Kela sat on the seat , crouching down like a baseball catcher, but with hands braced on the porch's railing.

He was about to ask what the werewolf was doing when he heard another howl off in the distance. This one sounded sad too. James decided to simply sit back and watch.

The exchange lasted for eight more howls each. Each one seemed to have a different tone, and he didn't get the same sad feeling from any of them after the first. As they continued he looked at a small painting of a couple standing in front of a castle that looked like it had been ripped from a Disney movie. He wasn't sure if it was just the painting, but it looked like it was made of glass too.

"What was that?" James asked once Kela had walked back inside.

"Howls are how werewolves converse over long distances. That howl you heard replying was my mate." Kela replied.

"That first howl you let out kinda surprised me. But... It also sounded really sad."

"It was. I normally work for four days, have a half day off in the middle, and then four more. Then I have a three day break before my next shift." Kela stated. "The injuries you gave me, coupled with your new status as my pack leader, AND my new responsibilities regarding you. Prevented my last break."

"Kela I'm-"

Kela interrupted, hand raised. "There is no need. It is not your fault. Our howls cannot recreate full sentences, but as you may have noticed they carry much emotion. My mate understands what happened. Besides, the princess carried word while you and I were still recovering."

"Oh. Ok I guess. Still, sorry." James said.

The wolf nodded. "Thank you. I will see them again soon."

James pointed at the painting. "Say. You said that you basically become human when the moon fades. So is this you and your mate?"

"Yes it is. That painting was made about... two years ago now."

"She's pretty cute dude. And cool castle. What's it made of?" James asked.

"Uh... thanks. " Kela replied a look of confusion evident. "It's made of magically grown diamond. It's considered one of the wonders of this world."

"Dude, that's badass."

"Um. James.... quick question." Kela queried.

"Yeah."

"You said. 'She's cute'. You know that that's me right?"

"What?"

Kela continued. "James I'm a woman. I suppose you're not accustomed to werewolf forms. But I am a woman."

"WHAT!?"

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qdpb4f/wait_is_this_just_gate_7/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (5/?)

After the interrogation, and sending his message, James was led to veranda several levels higher up in the castle. It was a simple space. Tiled floor that swept out in an arc from the building. It had an awning, made of white stone lattice that looked like marble, going up about twenty feet. The lattice was weaved through by a vine that reminded him of his mother's star lavender vine she'd grown since he was a kid. But the flowers were a bright bright red. And they smelled like cinnamon.

But as interesting as the flowered awning was, the view was what really stole his attention.

Normally he would have noticed the sprawling estate of the castle they were in. The acres of garden, the small training area, the stable, the small farm field (complete with greenhouse), and an area that he was fairly certain was a parade ground. He also might have noticed nearly a mile away that there were walls, roughly a hundred feet tall being patrolled by guards and having ballista and catapults spaced here or there.

But James was too busy looking up.

So there is a sun. Good I'll be able to charge my phone. Looks like the moon is coming up too. But holy hell. This planet has rings.

Looming over a good portion of the sky was a long arcing smudge of brown and blue that he recognized immediately. Only a few years before NASA had finally revealed the images that a probe had taken of the rings around Neptune. All of which had been taken from within the outer edges of the planet's atmosphere. The images had fascinated him. Space always had.

And now he was looking at some honest to god planetary rings. From the surface of a planet. And he wasn't even wearing his full uniform, much less an EVA suit or something.

"Wooooooaaaaah." was all he could manage.

"You mentioned needing sunlight earlier. I wasn't sure if you had had a chance to take a good look out a window yet." Kela said from beside him. "I figured you might like a chance to see the sky first hand."

"Yeah..... Yeah this is nice." He was clearly distracted. "Thanks."

"How does it compare to your home?"

"Honestly? Kinda blows it out of the water."

"Really?" The werewolf asked, a hint of confusion in their voice.

"Yeah. We uh. We don't have rings around our world." He said. "That's some real sci-fi type shit."

"Sci-Fi?"

"Some other time." James said. "That's a lot to unpack. You'll understand once I do though."

At this the werewolf simply shrugged and looked back out. Though they seemed to focus more on the training grounds. Not that James noticed.

After another minute or so the wind picked up and James felt a chill and shuddered from the cold. He'd forgotten that he was only wearing a t-shirt and pants.

"Come. Night is nearly upon us." The wolf began walking toward the door inside. "I shall show you to the bathes and we shall get you some proper sleepwear."

"Yeah." James replied. He took one last look out before turning around. *Two moons, cool. Suppose I can't be too surprised. Rings. Fuckin' wild man.* He thought before walking inside.

After a few minutes of walking in contemplative silence, Kela and James arrived at the bathes. It had a picture of a bathtub with steam coming out of it. And more of those symbols that James couldn't understand.

"Please. Go in and do whatever you need to to refresh yourself for the night. I shall go and find some sleeping clothes for you." Kela said while looking about. "There are servants in there to aid you as needed. Ill meet you afterwards."

"Oh, ok. You don't need a bath?"

"We werewolves use different bathing areas. Fur." Kela said after seeing his confused look.

"Ah, gotcha. Guess that makes sense."

The bath was heaven. James had never been a spa and nail day kind of guy. His first NCO back home, SGT Thompson, had sworn by mani-pedi's and spa days, especially after a field exercise. But James had never seen the point. BUT he was definitely a Jacuzzi tub kind of guy. He had fully intended to get one installed whenever he settled down and started a family in a house of his own. Not that that was an option anymore.

The bathtubs in the castle's ambassador wing would make a Jacuzzi look like a mud filled hole in the ground.

Each of the tubs was set into the ground and looked to be made of bronze. When he stepped in, the bottom of the tub lit up with a soft orange glow and he FELT the floor of the tub shift into a new shape. As he lowered himself into the water he felt the water quickly rise from the room temperature it had just been, up to a nice balmy warmth that felt absolutely perfect. And as he sat down he landed in a chair that he didn't remember being there a moment ago, it was the exact size and angle he needed to recline comfortably.

He was just about to truly begin relaxing when suddenly a voice from behind made him jump a little.

"Welcome sir. I see you're enjoying the bathtub. The royal family had them installed specifically to impress guests here at the castle." Said a well dressed young man holding a basket with bottles in it.

"Uh. Yeah, yeah this is nice."

"Glad to hear sir." The attendant replied. "What kind of cleansing solution would you need today? And do you have a preference in scent?"

"Ummm. Just soap and shampoo I suppose. Do you guys have citrus scent?"

"Of course sir." The young man grabbed a small bar of soap and a small orange vial.

Guess citrus is pretty universal. James thought.

"Is there anything else you desire of me sir?"

"I guess some towels for afterwards." He said.

"No need sir. You'll find the towels just on the half wall over there." At this the young man pointed to a low wall with several cubbies full of various towels and robes. "Also we've placed the sleepwear that Captain Kela procured for you. You'll find them there as well."

"Oh, cool. Thanks man."

"Of course sir. Enjoy the bath." Then the young man quickly walked over to another tub several yards away. In that tub sat a person who was covered in scales, though in all other ways they looked as human as anyone else. Upon seeing this James realized he should probably look around a bit.

The room had about ten different tubs in it, and one that might as well be called a pool. Each was roughly four to five yards apart from the next. He saw the fish/lizard person. One had two people in it that looked like they could be twins, and also had glowing golden hair. One of the tubs had a person in it who had to be at least eight feet tall, and looked like they could bench-press the Stryker he'd been in. That guy was also covered from head to toe (or at least to water) with blue tattoos that seemed to writhe ever so slightly when he looked at them. He quickly looked away when the man looked at him. Two of the remaining tubs were filled with run of the mill humans.

Yep. D&D land. I'm in D&D land.....awesome. So awesome. He thought sarcastically.

After about twenty minutes, during which he only broke down and disassociated a little bit, James finally wrapped things up. The soap and shampoo smelled like apricots and lime, not quite what he'd expected but still nice. He walked over past the half wall and dried himself off before putting on the night clothes.

They were basically just a pair of green silk pajamas, the pants were a touch short, but they were comfortable enough. They also had a pair of good old fashioned flip flops, he was pretty sure his mom had hit him with a pair just like them when he was a kid.

Even fantasy land children must know to fear LA CHANCLA!! The thought made him laugh as he walked out the door.

"What's so funny?" Kela asked. The large wolf had been waiting for him apparently. The armor and bandages having been replaced by a larger, gold and red, version of what he was wearing. Minus the flip flops.

The thought entered his head too fast for him to stop. *Imagine the sound a pair of flip flops would make if a damn werewolf was wearing them while running on these stone floors.* And James burst out laughing even harder.

After a minute of trying to get his bearing back, James looked back up at, a very clearly annoyed Kela.

"I'm sorry. Just." He stopped to breathe for a minute. "Just stupid thoughts." Another breath. "Thoughts about how similar some things are, even when they aren't"

The wolf stared at him. It was obvious that Kela wasn't amused.

"So where do I sleep? Dungeon? Tower guarded by a dragon? Royal Chambers?" He said the last option in a posh English accent.

"Actually since I'm now a member of your pack. You'll be staying in my quarters."

"Wait. What?" James asked.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qd1x5s/wait_is_this_just_gate_6/)

Wait, is this just GATE? (4/?)

The interrogation went on for nearly seven hours, only taking breaks so that James could be taken to a latrine (not as bad as some of the ones the Army had made him use, James had thought) and for a short meal break.

The meal was actually delicious, consisting of a bowl of hearty soup that reminded James of a mix between a curry and a chili, with a small bread ball that had been filled with herbs and cheese, and a glass of water. Kela was given a similar meal and ate with him, their conversation had taken a less formal tone while they were eating. Less an interrogation and more of a conversation.

Honestly though, as far as interrogations went, James was surprised at how lax it was. There had been no torture, no harsh questions, not even a beating or a threat. It felt more like an interview than anything else. He'd even been allowed to refuse questions, which he mainly did when they pertained to the Army, or questions that felt a touch too personal. Afterwords Kela had left the room for a few minutes, returning with his cell phone and a key to the shackles and chair strap.

"Please, follow me. We're done here." Kela said.

"So. Did I pass? Did the guys behind the mirror decide that I'm not a threat?"

At that Kela stiffened. "You knew there were people behind the mirror? Could you see them?" Kela asked.

"No. But the whole 'two way mirror' trick is a pretty common thing where I'm from. Though probably not as common as movies want us to think."

"Hmm. Interesting. And no, they did not determine that you're 'NOT' a threat." Kela replied. "They simply determined that you were mainly being truthful, minus a few things here and there. As such they believe that while you are a threat, you aren't currently enough of one to warrant imprisonment."

"Well, I guess that's good."

"Indeed. Also they've determined that you may use your phone to contact your home if possible. I'm to lead you to the summoning room. They believe that it will give your phone a better chance of reaching them. Though I am to monitor anything you say to them."

"What?" James asked, somewhat surprised. "But my phone doesn't have any signal to reach them. I couldn't send a te-" At this a loud tap issues from the mirror.

"They know this is a lie Mr. James. It is alright though. They want you to send a message. I don't know why. but they do."

"They can tell when I'm lying?"

"In this room they can." The werewolf continued to the door. "Please, follow me."

Well shit. That's awkward. James thought. He grimaced and gave a half hearted wave to the mirror before following.

James had been conscious when they had left the room he'd woken up in. That walk had only been a few halls over from where the "Interrogation" had occurred. The walk from the interrogation room to the summoning room was a bit further. In fact it was on a much lower level as well, at least three floors by James' guess.

The hall was also much busier this time. Before there had only been a handful of guards patrolling. Several of them were as big as, or even bigger than, Kela. But there were some that were more in line with what he had to assume were humans. Though one of them had also had wings, that moved in a way that suggested they were real. That guard had also had a beak shape on their helmet.

Great, I'm playing D&D on realism mode. Jonesy would be super jealous. James had thought.

Now however there were other people walking about. There were still guards, but there were also people that he had to assume were royal servants. They carried crates, and bags, and trays of who knows what.

Some of them were having conversations, in fact he was pretty sure he overheard a bit of flirting when he passed one pair of men.

Well I guess they don't worry about that thing in this world. Progressive. Bit startling for a seemingly medieval setting. But maybe a good sign for the state of their society.

There was one outlier in the hustle and bustle. Princess Amina was standing outside the summoning room when they arrived there. She was glaring daggers at James as they approached.

"I can't say I agree with this." She said to Kela, never breaking her glare. "We should not let him contact home."

"I don't either." Kela replied coolly. "But your father insists. Also the mages are curious as to whether or not it's even possible."

"I still don't like it."

"Relax your highness." James interrupted, he made sure to throw some haughtiness on the title. "I doubt it'll even work. Even if it does, it's not like anyone would believe any of this."

"You had better remove that attitude before I remove it for you." This, unexpectedly came from Kela.

James balked, "Sorry." He looked back at the princess. "Look, I'm sorry I took your friend from you. I was just trying to defend myself. I have only the most basic idea of where I am. And I have no idea what I'm gonna do about it." The princess's demeanor actually softened somewhat at hearing that. "I'm really not gonna cause any trouble for you guys. I figure I can at least hear out whatever reason you had for.... summoning me. Until then I'm just trying to figure out what the hell's going on." He held his hand out. "Deal?"

"You'd better." Was the princess's only reply. But she did shake his hand. Then she turned to Kela, who had just opened the door. "I will become your pack leader again."

"Last time you only barely managed a scratch on my face. So I kind of doubt it." Kela replied.

"If my blade had been silvered that 'scratch' would have left you with a scar from forehead to throat, and missing an eye at that."

"Ah, but it wasn't silvered. Also he shot me in the chest three times. Two of those went all the way through and out my back. I had to cough up the third one. If his 'bullets' as he calls them had been silvered, I would be dead three times over. I don't think you can top that."

"AHEM" James interrupted, again. "Guys, as much as I enjoy some half veiled, warrior flirting. Can I send my message now?"

"Right, sorry Mr. James." Kela said. The werewolf gestured to the now open door. "Please come in and send the message."

James walked in. The room was bigger than he had thought, roughly the size of a basketball court and nearly forty feet to the ceiling. He was surprised to see that the remains of the STRYKER3 had been completely removed, despite the lack of any doors or openings large enough to do so, at least that he could see.

"Please, the summoning circle is over here." Kela said.

But James didn't need to be told that. He knew where it was. There were still two blood stains on the floor. Apparently blood was as hard to remove in this world as it was in his. Magic or not.

He stood, looking at it for a moment. For a while, he had forgotten how violent his entrance to this world had been.

"You know Kela." He said, the werewolf turned to regard him. " I'm never going to forgive you for that." He nodded at the blood stains. "I don't know what happened to Batty. I know it wasn't good. Not if he lost his damn leg. But I do know what happened to Odie."

At this he turned to look at the werewolf standing across the circle. The warrior wolf didn't look away.

"I don't know how good your nose is. I don't know if he did have liver cancer again. Or if he really had broken his back. I'm not a doctor, I couldn't make those determinations under any circumstance." He paused, tears forming in his eyes. "But you could have at least given him a choice. He deserved at least that much."

"Mr. James I am-"

"IT'S NOT MR. JAMES! IT'S JUST JAMES. OR CHOI IF YOU PREFER. BUT DROP THE MISTER BIT AND GET IT RIGHT!" He yelled. He didn't really know why. Kela jumped a little.

"James. I'm sorry. You... are right. I forget sometimes that not everyone holds to the wolf way of things." Was all the wolf could say while lowering their head.

"I will not ever forgive you for this. None of you." He said.

"That is as you wish. I understand."

He stared at the blood stains a moment longer, and wiped his eyes. Then he stepped forward and took a knee between the two stains. He reached out with both hands and touched them, lightly.

"Batty. I hope you're ok bud. And if you are then I hope you're not tellin em I'm AWOL." He looked over to the larger stain. "Sarge. Man. I'm Sorry dude. I'm so sorry." He was crying again.

"James. This is no-"

"SHUT THE HELL UP!" James interrupted. "JUST....shut up for a minute."

Kela did.

He wiped his eyes again. Then he stood up and looked at the wolf. "You better not die before I kill you." He took the phone out and opened the text message app. *Two bars now. I guess that is an improvement.* "I probably can't make a call. But I can at least send a text message. Don't worry. I'll leave the phone unlocked so that your 'mages' can read it. You know, once they figure out English translations."

"That should be fine." Kela said.

DEAR MOM. NOT AWOL OR ANYTHING. DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN CURRENT SITUATION. HOPE BATTY IS OK. TELL THEM I'M STILL ALIVE. BUT UNFORTUNATELY SGT ODIKOWE IS DEAD. WILL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO MAKE IT HOME. BUT I HAVE NO IDEA HOW. I'M NOT DEAD YET. G-G-G-PA'S STORY IS GONNA LOOK LIKE A WALK DOWN TO THE CORNER STORE COMPARED TO WHAT I'M GONNA HAVE TO DO TO GET HOME. BUT I WILL.

LOVE YOU. TELL JOEY THAT I THINK I MIGHT HAVE DONE ONE OF THOSE ISSEKAY THINGS HE LOVES MIGHT HELP EXPLAIN A BIT.

Then he hit the send button and handed the phone to Kela as he walked towards the door.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qcbo3z/wait_is_this_just_gate_5/)

----------Writer's note:----------

For those wondering. Certain things might seem obvious to us, and certain things might not be. Also there are going to be times when it seems like things have been forgotten about.

This is partly because I'm nowhere near perfect at writing. But it's also because James, for all his main-character-ness isn't the best narrator.

He's an Army Specialist who is so lost in the sauce it's ridiculous. So he is not a reliable narrator, because how could he be.

That's called using your character to cover your own flaws as a writer, and I definitely don't recommend it. But I do hope you're all enjoying the story. I am.

Wait, is this just GATE? (3/?)

"So, now that we're officially in the interrogation part of our meeting. What is this 'Phone' thing that makes the music?" Kela asked him, holding said phone up.

They were in a room that would have fit into any episode of Law and Order, CSI, 24, or any other crime drama show he'd ever seen in his life.

Heavy duty wooden table bolted to the ground that his hands were shackled to. Similarly heavy duty, bolted down, chair that he was strapped to at the waist. Oh and the large mirror that was very obviously where they had people watching him.

At least he's dressed, they gave him back his underwear, pants, and undershirt. Though they kept everything else, even his belt. No weapons, or suicide options, totally fair.

The only real difference was that the room was made out of cobbled stone and there were no electronics in sight. Well, minus his phone.

On top of that, James' face hurt. He was rubbing his jaw where he'd been hit.

"It's a cell phone dude. Um, a long range communication device, that's also capable of both finding and displaying information." He responded, still rubbing his jaw. "Why did that super model punch me in the face? Who was that?"

"That was first princess, and commander of the Petravian guard, Amina Petravius." Kela replied. "As for why she punched you. Well, she's probably upset that you managed to defeat me so handily. She's not a fan of sharing her toys, so to speak."

"What? You and her boyfriend and girlfriend or something? I got a couple buddies that'd love to watch that, fuckin' furries."

"I honestly don't even understand half of what you just said. But I have been her right hand for nearly a decade now."

"Never mind. Speaking of understanding each other. How are we doing that? That sign over the door on the way in definitely wasn't in English. So what language was it?"

"Well that's easy enough." Kela said. "Right now you're in the castle's diplomat wing. Every room in this wing has been infused with runes that allow people to speak freely amongst each other without need for a translator's presence." Kela fiddled with the phone some more. "How does this thing work? I can make this side of it light up, but when I touch it it just shows me some nonsense alphabet."

James sighed and held out his hand. "Let me see it. Also it's not nonsense, it's English. Although, admittedly, English is kind of a nonsense language." He grabs the offered phone and presses his thumb to the fingerprint symbol. "It's programmed specifically to only allow me to use it."

Weird, I have a single half-assed bar of signal. But I'm also roaming. How the hell? He looks up to see the werewolf with a hand back on it's sword.

"Want to relax a bit? I can't hurt you with this thing. Only damage this thing could do to you is if I threw it at your head. Or left you a really bad Yelp review." He pulls up his camera and snaps a picture of the werewolf, luckily he made sure to disable the flash. Then he pulls the picture up. "See, check it out. I took a picture of you. If you swipe your.....finger... on the screen it'll show you other pictures. Don't worry, no dick pics.." Kela relaxes, loosening their grip on the sword and takes the phone back.

Kela looks like a child seeing a new toy for the first time. The werewolf stares at it's picture for a while before following James' directions and swiping. James waves at the mirror and smiles, mouthing the words ^(I know you're in there.) To the people that are guaranteed to be watching.

"This is amazing, these paintings are so realistic." Kela keeps swiping. "What else can this 'phone' do?"

"Uh tap that little circle at the bottom of the screen." Kela complies. "Now hit that red circle with the musical note."

At this Kela looks confused and holds the phone closer so he can show what he means. He taps it and then picks one of his favorite songs.

The voice of Dryden Mitchell screams as he begins Alien Ant Farm's cover of Smooth Criminal. Kela drops the phone on the table.

"What the hell was that!?" the werewolf exclaims while reaching for the sword again.

"Relax, relax." James says as he picks the phone up. "It's just music. Oh good, you didn't break the screen."

"That is not music. They just made a screaming noise. And now they're just speaking gibberish while music plays in the background." But James sees the werewolf's ears twitching to the beat.

So, those magic runes don't translate what my phone plays? Interesting.

"Don't lie. I can see your ears dancing along to the beat. You really can't understand what he's saying? I mean, yeah he's talking fast. But he's speaking the same language I am."

"All I hear is gibberish that matches the beat. I will admit that the beat is.... interesting though." Kela replies.

"Interesting." James turns the music off. "Well look. This thing is LEGITIMATELY harmless. It doesn't even show as having the ability to communicate right now." He lies. "Do you mind if I keep it. It has some

books on it that I can read to keep myself entertained. At least for the next few hours before it dies."

"It will die? Wait, that's a living thing?" Kela asks.

"What? No. No. It just runs out of energy. After that it can't be used until it gets recharged."

"Ah, yes. We have some devices that operate in a similar fashion. How do you 'recharge' it?"

"That depends." James says. "Have you guys got any of the stuff from my STRYKER? Namely a little green back pack that matches my uniform's pattern. If so than I do have the stuff in there to recharge. Though I'll need access to some sunlight."

He hadn't thought of that yet. Did this place even have a sun? If so, how many? He hadn't seen any sign of the outdoors since he'd woken up. He'd seen some windows here or there. But he'd been too preoccupied at the time to really pay any attention to what was outside of them.

"In due time." Kela said, knocking him out of his train of thought. "For now I'll have to take this back. Our mages will have to take a closer look at it."

Well, worth a shot at least.

"In the mean time." Kela continued. "Tell me more about the world you came from."

--------------PAGE BREAK--------------------

TOP SECRET

To: CDR Zulu, NSA command, Task force: Secret Keepers

Regarding: Anomaly report- 06/23/2048

Report begins:

At approximately 0345 on the Forward Operating Base: Eagle, at Ft Irwin's National Training Center. An as yet undetermined Spatial anomaly occurred involving a STRYKER3 vehicle and it's three occupants. Said occupants were performing routine guard duty when a green glow began to occur throughout the front section of the vehicle. The glow encompassed the driver, co-driver, and the legs of the soldier currently manning the gun.

After several moments of the glow, the section of the vehicle being affected disappeared, leaving the remainder of the vehicle, and gunner, in their current location. The gunner's screams of pain were the first thing to alert any of the other personnel that were also on duty at the time. Said personnel then rushed to their aid, to find the gunner missing one leg and bleeding profusely while screaming about "Fucking Aliens".

The gunner, one CPL Batista, is currently recovering at a nearby hospital and is the source of first hand account of events. Driver, SGT Odikowe, and co-driver, SPC Choi are currently missing. Assumed to be with the missing section of the STRYKER3. Wherever that may be.

As of now, the nature of the anomaly is undetermined and being investigated further.

Curiously despite cell phones being off limits during guard duty while in NTC, signals from the missing personnel's phones were discovered. The driver's phone was found bundled into a pair of socks in his duffel bag. But the co-driver's phone was tracked to the location of the anomaly. Despite not being physically present the phone continues to give off signal from said location.

Wherever they ended up. It is not currently believed to be on earth. Maybe not even our dimension. At least according to our analysts.

Will continue to keep you updated as we uncover more.

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Wait, is this just GATE? (2/?)

James woke up to a melody that he had known for years now. One that a good percentage of modern cell phone owning people would know, and likely hate. Or at least smart, non i-phone using, people would know it.

It was his alarm. 0500 in the morning time to get ready for PT and whatever duty followed.

It was also time for him to wake up hungover as shit. Something that the loud melody of his phone was not helping with. He had a migraine that could kill a man.

Then he remembered that he was in NTC and that if he and his boys had gotten so wasted that he could sport a hangover, then he probably needed to get up and get "Un-hungover" ASAP. That way he could attempt to do some damage control. Who knows, if he works fast he might even find out that there's nothing to worry about. Coffee First, IV from doc second, figure out how badly you fucked up third.

Actually, probably need to at least throw some underwear on first. He thought. *Wait a minute, I only sleep naked when I get laid. And why is this bed so soft. Oh god, this isn't a cot with a wubby.*

James opened his eyes, and launched himself to his feet. What he saw, brought back the memories that he had assumed were some fucked up nightmare.

Standing in front of him was a nearly seven foot tall.... thing. Thing was all James' brain could quantify it as. It definitely couldn't be the thing his brain wanted to call it. Because that was crazy. Those things

didn't actually exist. And yet here one was, holding his cellphone in it's.... hand. Though hand might not be accurate, could be a claw, or a paw, or who knows what this thing calls it.

Oh fuck it. Let's just address the elephant in the room. James thought. *That's a fucking werewolf. That's a fucking werewolf the size of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, and it's holding my cellphone.*

Actually acknowledging what it very clearly was, DID NOT make James feel any better.

Without even realizing what he was doing James jumped over the bed that he'd just gotten out of, and took cover behind it. The werewolf finally noticed his stirring and looked over at him. It took a stance that James recognized as a fighting stance. It put it's hand to it's side, resting on the pommel of a sword.

Oh come on, the werewolf has a fucking sword? Wait, a SWORD?!?! Oh, fuck.... It's wearing armor too.

At least it was wearing some armor. It's upper arms, and legs were armored. But it's chest had been wrapped in bandages. It began walking towards James, hand gripping the sword. In the other hand was the now silent phone. *It'll just go off again in ten minutes.* James thought. The monster held the phone out to him.

"What is this music glass? Is it some kind of sorcerous device?" It asked in a deep, rumbling, voice.

"Oh fuck me, you fucking talk?" James replied. At this point he was practically curled up into a ball in the corner of the room. He didn't remember moving there. He'd been too focused on the Werewolf.

"Maybe later. And of course I talk. Everyone Talks. Tell me what this is." With it's off hand, the one that had previously been gripping the sword, it grabbed the side of the bed and pushed it. It was, James had noticed, roughly a queen sized bed. It was also made of solid wood and, he thought, fairly well made. And this werewolf, that could talk, had just slid it across the room as easily as he might push aside a rolling chair.

The werewolf was now leaning down, holding the phone in front of him, maybe a foot or two away. He could feel the warm breath coming from it's nostrils, could smell the fur, and.... vanilla? He swallowed hard. He was shaking. What the hell was going on.

"What. Is. This?" It asked, it's hand moving down to it's sword again.

"It's just a phone." He replied. He'd never felt more scared in his life. "My phone. That noise was just my alarm clock."

The werewolf stood up, a small smirk on it's face. "So it can speak AND it has it's memories intact. Good. I had worried that Jalthar's strike might have caused some brain damage."

What in the ass is a Jalthar? Was all James could think.

"So." The werewolf continued. "What is your name human?"

"Um.... James. Are you actually a werewolf?" He asked.

"Ah, you know of us? Amazing. Some of us must have plane walked to your world at some point in the past. Wonder how they did it?" It held it's hand to it's chin in thought. "Maybe the moon mages? they might know."

"Um excuse me. WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?" James interrupted.

"Oh, right." The werewolf stood up taller. "Mr. James. I am Knight Captain Kela of the Petravian Guard. You have been summoned to help our kingdom in a time of need." Kela's face became somewhat shameful, or at least James thought it was shameful. It was hard to tell with the fur but he thought Kela might be blushing. "Also since you have bested me in battle, technically I am now part of your pack."

"Part of my pack? Bested you in battle? What are you-" And then James remembered. He looked at the bandages on Kela's chest. "You were the one I shot?"

"Yes. Luckily the projectiles weren't silv-"

Before James could think, he had charged the massive werewolf and tackled them. He was furious, and began punching the monster in the ribs as hard as he could. His tackle hadn't brought it down, but he had it on it's back leg, and was using what little he'd learned in combatives to try to get it's other leg out from under it.

"YOU KILLED SARGEANT ODIE! I'LL FUCKIN KILL YOU!" He began punching at the beast's ribs. It felt like punching a set of iron bars wrapped in a fur coat. "HE HAD A FAMILY!" He began kicking at the knee of the unyielding leg. "MOTHERFUCKER!"

Suddenly he felt a large, clawed, hand grab the back of his neck, and suddenly he was being lifted up off his feet. He wasn't done though. He began grabbing at the hand, and kicking with all his strength at the werewolf's stomach as he rose.

"Please stop Mr. James. I'm still recovering and the bruises still hurt quite a bit." It held his right foot and lifted it up so that James was now sideways in the air, roughly five feet off the ground. "Besides, without silver your attacks are all but useless anyways. Just annoying really."

James looked it in the eyes. For the first time he noticed that they were a bright green color, almost neon lime, with dark brown sclera. "You killed Odie, and I don't know what you did to Batty, BUT HIS FUCKIN LEG WAS CUT OFF!"

The werewolf looked away for a moment, thinking, and then it looked back. "I'm very sorry about your comrades. For what it's worth, I did not summon the portal. I do not have that ability." It seemed to consider it's next words carefully. "As for the one I killed. I know it may be difficult to accept, but they were already dead. I could sense it the moment I got that window out of my way. My strike was not one of malice, but of mercy."

"What are you fucking talking about?" James asked, still struggling against his lupine captor.

"His back was broken. He must not have been properly braced when that contraption you were in fell. Additionally he had the flesh rot in his liver. Even if his back hadn't been injured, he would have only lasted maybe another year." The were wolf gave a deep sniff. "My nose, hell any werewolf's nose would have been able to smell it from miles away."

That put a stop to his struggling. James didn't recognize the term, but he knew what Kela was talking about. "He relapsed?" That made sense actually. "Shit. He told me he'd cleared that stuff out years ago at his last base."

"Can I put you down now? I don't think my mate would appreciate me having a penis dangling in front of my face for this long. Least of all a human's."

In his anger, James had completely forgotten about his nudity. He couldn't help but blush while he quickly reached down to cover himself up.

"Uh.... yeah. Please do." He replied.

Kela did, and he quickly walked over to the displaced bed, and wrapped himself in the blanket. Just in time too. As the door to the room swung open.

When it did, the most beautiful woman James had ever seen in his life walked in and walked straight towards him.

Woah. She's fucking gorgeous. Was the last thing he could think before she punched him in the face.

[Next](https://www.reddit.com/r/HFY/comments/qavxvy/wait_is_this_just_gate_3/)